

**50th
Issue**

the folk, roots and world music magazine

penguin eggs

the decemberists

greg allman

loudon wainwright III

sylvia tyson

dougie maclean

david francey



win emmylou harris's new cd – hard bargain

Issue No. 50 Summer 2011 \$5.99



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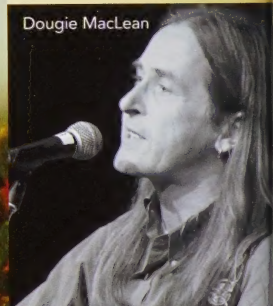
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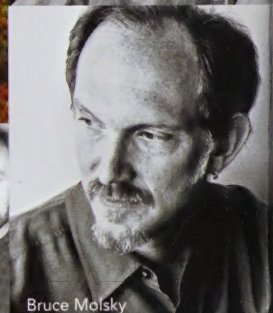
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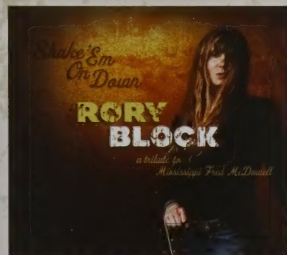
To celebrate **Stony Plain Records'** 35th Anniversary, we've put together a specially priced two CD set with a free bonus DVD.

Previously unreleased material includes a session by **Robert Nighthawk**, a track by **King Biscuit Boy** and 3 songs by the late **Bob Carpenter**. The DVD includes interviews, rare videos and a tribute to the late **Jeff Healey**. This is a stunning collection and a joyful surprise for true music fans everywhere

HARRY MANX & KEVIN BREIT

Strictly Whatever

Strictly Whatever is the second offering on Stony Plain for these two virtuoso musicians. **Harry Manx & Kevin Breit**, "a match made in guitar heaven," are unique Canadian players with impressive resumes as in-demand recording artists and busy performers. Both artists contribute original material and lead vocals to this set which includes unique covers of the **Bobby Hebb** classic "Sunny" and **John Lee Hooker's** "Mr. Lucky."



RORY BLOCK

Shake 'Em On Down: A Tribute To Mississippi Fred McDowell

This is the latest in a series celebrating the music of her mentors, and her second for Stony Plain. *Shake 'Em On Down* includes covers of a few of **Fred McDowell's** best known songs, a few obscurities and four originals written by **Rory Block**.

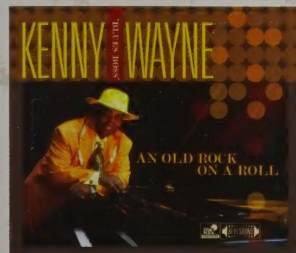
Rory actively tours internationally and each new CD is a high profile occasion in the blues community. This is released in conjunction with her autobiography *When A Woman Gets The Blues*.

MONKEYJUNK

To Behold

MonkeyJunk draw heavily on the legends of the blues and translates those influences into a contemporary blend of "swamp R&B, soul boogie and bedroom funk." At the 2011 **Maple Blues Awards** they won *Electric Act Of The Year*, *Harmonica Player Of The Year* and *Drummer Of The Year*. They also won *Best New Artist Debut* at the 2010 **Blues Music Awards** in Memphis—a first for a Canadian group.

Available June 21, 2011



KENNY 'BLUES BOSS' WAYNE

An Old Rock on a Roll

Available June 21, 2011

Kenny 'Blues Boss' Wayne is a veteran blues and boogie piano player, raised in New Orleans but a long-time Vancouver resident. Influenced by **Fats Domino** and **Johnnie Johnson**, Kenny has worked in the past with **Joe Louis Walker**, **Delaney** and **Bonnie Bramlett**, **Billy Preston** and members of **Sly & The Family Stone**.

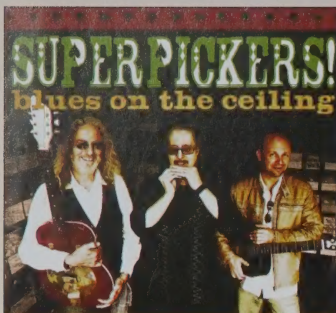
"He's a monster pianist, a soulful singer, and he captures the essence of old school blues and boogie while sounding totally fresh and contemporary." - **Duke Robillard**, producer

Also this year: **Maria Muldaur**, **Duke Robillard** and more...

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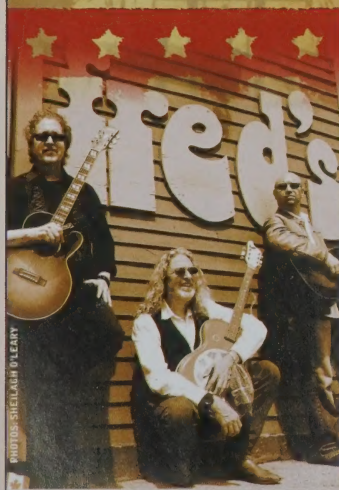
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ACOUSTIC-BASED TRACKS
DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE BLUES
BUT WITH FLOURISHES OF FOLK
AND BLUEGRASS.”**

The Scope, St. John’s



penguin eggs

Canada's Folk, Roots and World Music Magazine

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This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones's wonderful album *Penguin Eggs* — a collection of mainly traditional British folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for many young, gifted performers.

Nic, sadly, suffered horrific injuries in a car crash in 1982 and has never fully recovered. He now seldom performs. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation makes *Penguin Eggs* such an outrageously fine recording. This magazine strives to reiterate that spirit. Nic Jones's *Penguin Eggs* is available through Topic Records.

Penguin Eggs magazine is published and printed in Canada and acknowledges the generous financial support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. We also acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities.



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editorial

"Time to ring some changes," sang the Albion Band on their magnificent 1978 album *Rise Up Like The Sun*. It took us a while, but with issue No. 50, we indeed made some needed ch-ch-ch-changes — apologies to you David Bowie buffs. For starters, we've dropped the fiddle tunes and songs and added more pages to the reviews section. Musical scores for all kinds of acoustic instruments are now readily available on the Internet, often with instructional YouTube videos to assist the humblest beginner. I know, I've just bought a clawhammer banjo.

When not scouring sites like Banjo Hangout for tips, I call my pal, folk impresario and old-time banjo enthusiast Mitch Podolak in Winnipeg. "I learned this from Mike Seeger," he tells me as he patiently explains a picking pattern and then plays it over the telephone. Brilliant. The printed page seems cold in comparison.

You'll notice more high-profile interviews in this issue. While we actively pursued The Decemberists, our cover feature, due to the popularity of their superb current album *The King Is Dead*, all others appear on purely creative merit regardless of name recognition. It does make a difference, though, having familiar faces on the cover. Over-the-counter sales do increase. After 10 years, we, obviously, still need to work on our branding. I jest. Highlighting the endeavours of wonderful, often unheralded talent lies at the heart of what makes this magazine creditable. Our enthusiasm is biased. And for that I make no apologies. The likes of brilliant, once little-known talent such as Basia Bulat or Ridley Bent will always enjoy a place on the front of this magazine. History is on our side.

We've dropped the DJ spotlight, too. Radio interests really boil down to the personal and practical. Intelligent, intuitive local personalities with tastes similar or broader than my own, who highlight and promote live listings in my community, appeal to me. It's easy to reciprocate that kind of benevolence.

The charts pages now include Winnipeg and Edmonton and provide more of a snapshot from coast to coast. The size of this country makes it so difficult to keep track of emerging new talent in our disparate regions. Not that commercial success offers a decisive indicator of novel or outstanding ability, but it does raise helpful hints.

At our current progress, issue No. 100 will arrive sometime in 2023. What brave new face will it feature? We can only imagine.

— By Roddy Campbell

cover feature

42 . . . Described as everything from prog rock to indie folk, The Decemberists have always followed their instincts, as one would expect from a band named after an uprising in imperial Russia in 1825. Their delightful latest disc, *The King Is Dead*, recently hit No. 1 on the U.S. album charts. Colin Irwin has a word.

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quotable

"Meanwhile, we can all bask in the beauty of an honest, down-to-earth band with their hearts in the right place making music for the right reasons achieving the sort of success usually reserved for the chancers and charlatans."

— Colin Irwin praises The Decemberists

"I swear I had never even heard T Bone [Burnett]'s name, but I knew some of his work like the *O, Brother* soundtrack. We got to talkin' and I asked him what he was doin' in Memphis and he told me about the soundtrack for the *Crazy Heart* film. But he also brought two builders with him to Memphis. They were measuring the Sun Records Studio for him, board by board and they were going to build a replica of Sun Records on his property in California."

— Greg Allman meets T Bone Burnett

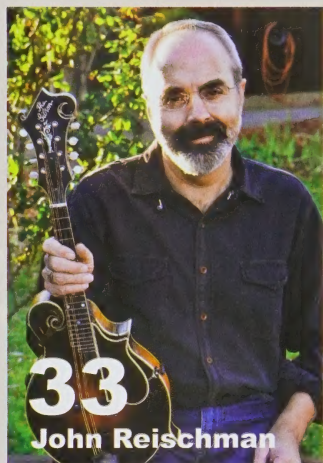
"We were a couple and we had a marriage which was a fierce, passionate thing...we were young and crazy and it was exciting and sexy and I'm sorry that she had to die so soon. She was something else." — Loudon Wainwright III remembers Kate McGarrigle



Oh My Darling



Stepanie Gagnon



John Reischman



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david francey's all-time top 10

Willie P Bennett
Tryin' To Start Out Clean (Woodshed Records)

The Band
Music From Big Pink (Capitol)

Bruce Cockburn
Sunwheel Dance (True North)

John Hartford
Aereo Plain (Rounder)

Andy Irvine Paul Brady
Andy Irvine Paul Brady (Mulligan)

Kane Welsh Kaplin
Can't Save Everybody (Dead Reckoning)

Joni Mitchell
Blue (Reprise)

Planxty
Planxty (Shanachie)

John Prine
John Prine (Atlantic)

Neil Young
Harvest (Reprise)

David Francey's latest record, *Late Edition*, is on Laker Music Records. See the Penguin Eggs feature on David on page 29.



David Francey

fred's records top 5

1. Hey Rosetta
Seeds (Sonic Records)

2. Ryan's Fancy
What A Time! (Independent)

3. The Once
The Once (Borealis)

4. Amelia Curran
Hunter Hunter (WEA)

5. Adele
21 (Columbia)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at Fred's Records, 198 Duckworth Street, St. John's, NL, A1C 1G5



Lucinda Williams

wffms top 10

1. k.d. lang & the Siss Boom Bang
Sing It Loud (Warner Music)

2. Waitin' Jennys
Bright Morning Stars (Red House)

3. Bruce Cockburn
Small Source of Comfort (True North)

4. Mumford & Sons
Sigh No More (Classmate)

5. Andy White & Stephen Fearing
Andy White & Stephen Fearing (London/Prest)

6. Imaginary Cities
Temporary Resident (Hidden Pony)

7. Hayes Caril
Kmag Togo (Lost Highway)

8. Robbie Robertson
How to Become Clairvoyant (429 Records)

9. Lucinda Williams
Blessed (Lost Highway)

10. Jill Barber
Mischievous Moon (Outside Music)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at the Winnipeg Folk Festival Music Store, 203-211 Bannatyne Ave., Winnipeg, MB, R3B 3P2.

groundfloor music top 10

1. The Good Lovelies
The Good Lovelies (Six Shooter)

2. Bruce Cockburn
Small Source Of Comfort (True North)

3. Ray LaMontagne
God Willin' And The Creek Don't Rise (Red Ink)

4. The Waitin' Jennys
Bright Morning Stars (True North)

5. Paul Simon
So Beautiful or So What (Hear)

6. Loreena McKennitt
The Wind That Shakes The Barley (Quintan Road)

7. Lucinda Williams
Blessed (Lost Highway)

8. Harry Manx
Isle Of Manx (Dog My Cat)

9. Matt Andersen
Christmas Time (Busted Flat)

10. Kate & Anna McGarrigle
Oddities (Quereservice)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at Groundfloor Music, 13 Quebec St., Guelph, ON, N1H 2T1

highlife top 10

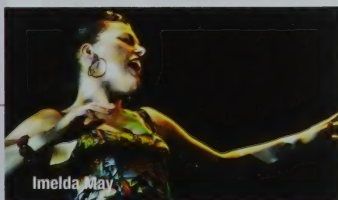
- Adele**
21 (Columbia)
- PJ Harvey**
Let England Shake (Island/Universal)
- Bombino**
Agadez (Cumbancha)
- Lucinda Williams**
Blessed (Lost Highway)
- Radiohead**
The King of Limbs (Tiger Tape)
- Ebo Taylor**
Love & Death (Strut)
- Aloe Blacc**
Good Things (Stones Throw)
- Kiran Ahluwalia**
Aam Zameen: Common Ground (Fantasy)
- Various Artists**
Mali Latino (Merge)
- Iron & Wine**
Kiss Each Other Clean (Six Shooter Records)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at
Highlife Records, 1317 Commercial Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3X5

permanent records top 10

- Imelda May**
May Day (Navigator Records)
- Timber Timbre**
Creep On Creepin' On (Arts & Crafts)
- Jeff Beck**
Rock N' Roll Party (Eagle Rock)
- Various Artists**
Great Northern Revival (Independent)
- Alison Krauss & Union Station**
Paper Airplane (Rounder)
- Alexi Murdoch**
Towards The Sun (Xero Summer Records)
- Daniel Romano**
Sleeps Beneath The Willow (You've Changed Records)
- Adele**
21 (Columbia)
- Paul Simon**
So Beautiful or So What (Hear)
- k.d. lang & the Siss Boom Bang**
Sing It Loud (Warner Music)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at
Permanent Records, 8126 Gateway Blvd. Edmonton,



Tiken Jah Fakoly

sillions top 10

- Richard Desjardins**
L'existoire (Distribution Select)
- Richard Séguin**
Appalaches (Independent)
- Emilie Clepper**
What You See (La Tribu)
- Various Artists**
Douze Hommes Rapailles (Spectra Musique)
- Fred Pellerin**
Silence (Disques Tempête)
- Les Charbonniers de l'Enfer**
Nouvelles fréquentations (La Tribu)
- Fred Pellerin**
L'Arracheuse de Temps (Disques Tempête)
- Tiken Jah Fakoly**
African Revolution (Wrasse Records)
- Enrico Macias**
Voyage d'une Mélodie (PID)
- Elisapie Isaac**
There Will Be Stars (Independent)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at
Sillions, 1149 Avenue Cartier, Quebec, QC, G1R 2S9.

soundscapes top 10

- Timber Timbre**
Creep On Creepin' On (Arts & Crafts)
- PJ Harvey**
Let England Shake (Island/Universal)
- Iron And Wine**
Kiss Each Other Clean (Warner Bros.)
- The Decemberists**
The King Is Dead (Reprise)
- Kurt Vile**
Smoke Ring For My Halo (Matador)
- Ron Sexsmith**
Long Player Late Bloomer (Warner Canada)
- Snowblink**
Long Live (Arts & Crafts)
- Willie Wright**
Telling The Truth (Numero Group)
- Drive-by Truckers**
Go-Go Boots (New West/Universal)
- Hey Rosetta**
Seeds (Sonic Records)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at
Soundscapes, 572 College St., Toronto, ON, M6G 1B3.

ckua top 20

- Bruce Cockburn**
Small Source Of Comfort (True North)
- Gregg Allman**
Low Country Blues (Rounder)
- Lucinda Williams**
Blessed (Lost Highway)
- Gurf Morlix**
Blaze Foley's 113th Wet Dream (Rooftop)
- Carlos Del Junco & The Blues Mongrels**
Mongrel Mash (Big Rock)
- Mae Moore**
Folklore (Independent)
- Stephen Fearing & Andy White**
Fearing & White (Loudes/Proud)
- Jenn Grant**
Honeymoon Punch (Six Shooter Records)
- Iron & Wine**
Kiss Each Other Clean (Six Shooter Records)
- Kiran Ahluwalia**
Aam Zameen: Common Ground (Fantasy)
- Michael Rault**
Ma-Me-O (Independent)
- The Wallin' Jennys**
Bright Morning Stars (True North)
- Leeroy Stagger**
Little Victories (Rebelstone)
- Anne Lindsay**
Hurry on Home (Gorealis)
- Karen Sovoca**
Promise (Aloove)
- Jill Barber**
Aam Zameen - Common Ground (Fantasy)
- The Decemberists**
Mischievous Moon (Outside)
- Alison Krauss & Union Station**
Paper Airplane (Rounder)
- Donald Ray Johnson**
It's Time (Reprise)
- Buddy Miller**
Buddy Miller's Majestic Silver Strings (New West)

Based on the most-played folk, roots and world music discs on ckua
radio - www.ckua.org throughout February, March and April.



Stephen Fearing & Andy White

News•Gossip•Rumour•Tattle

Contrary to popular opinion, **The Dhuks** have split ... into two bands that will tour sporadically throughout the year. **Leonard Podolak** (banjo), **Jordan McConnell** (guitar), **Jessee Havey** (vocals) and **Scott (Senor) Senior** (percussion) will perform several gigs together this summer, including the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, July 14-16. **Sarah Dugas** (vocals) and **Christian Dugas** (percussion) will join Podolak and McConnell for further shows throughout the year.

Jan. 12, 2012, marks The Dhuks' 10th anniversary as a band and Podolak touts a possible live album in the works of retooled old tunes and the odd new one, performed in concert in Winnipeg this coming winter with past and present members of the band.

The various members of the Winnipeg quintet have also kept busy with several individual projects. This past March, Podolak spent time in the U.K. with an all-star cast to create original songs that had a "resonance and relevance" to controversial English song collector **Cecil Sharp**, and in particular his song collecting in the Appalachians between 1915-1918. The other participants include **Steve Knightley** of **Show of Hands**, **Jim Moray**, **Jackie Oates**, **Kathryn Roberts**, **Caroline Her-ring**, **Patsy Reid**, and **Andy Cutting**.

Together they created 18 songs in a week, which they performed at Cecil Sharp House in London. A repeat production is scheduled

for August at the Shrewsbury Folk Festival. All performances will be recorded for a live album. The project was instigated by **Neal Pearson**, artistic director of the festival. Pearson orchestrated a similar endeavor to mark the bicentennial of **Charles Darwin's** birth, in 2009.

To hear an interview with some of the participants and the music they created, go to www.cecilsharpproject.com/broadcasts/frontrowbroadcast.mp3

Meanwhile, Podolak spent part of May in Gimli, MB, recording an album with his latest combo, **Dry Bones**, which includes **Nathan Rogers** and **J.D. Edwards**. They will make several summer festival appearances in B.C.

Not to be outdone, the Dugas siblings released the EP *Another Day* in February.

And Jason McConnell's luthier business received a huge promotional boost during the Grammys when **Seth Avett** of **The Avett Brothers** played a McConnell guitar alongside **Bob Dylan** and **Mumford & Sons** during a live ensemble version of *Maggie's Farm*. For more on McConnell's instruments, go to www.mcconnellguitars.com

The Winnipeg Folk Festival announced May 13 not to renew the contract of its executive director, **Tamara Kater**. Kater's two-year contract expired Dec. 1, 2010. Kater told *Penguin Eggs* she didn't understand why it happened. She had delivered

the festival's largest surplus ever in 2010, had secured two massive federal Marquee Grants and increased sponsorship donations in the 24 months she worked at the festival.

"All of my job evaluations were positive," she said. "If they had a problem, why didn't they talk to me? I don't understand why they couldn't have been more human about it. Why the rush to get me out the door?"

Allan Finkel, chairman of the festival's board, told the *Winnipeg Free Press* it was felt she was not the right person to lead the organization toward achieving all its goals.

Kater previously managed the Ottawa Folk Festival, helped bring the Canadian Folk Music Awards to Winnipeg, and worked on laying the groundwork for the lobby group Folk Music Canada.



One of the more unique festivals on this summer's schedule is the Festival of Small Halls in P.E.I. Founded in 2008, the festival, as its name implies, is held on numerous community stages throughout the island. It has now grown into an 11-day event, which runs June 16-26, and will feature 25 per cent more shows than in years past. Besides traditional and contemporary folk music, it will now offer dance and storytelling. Performers booked to date include **Catherine MacLellan**, **Richard Wood**, Ireland's **Nuala Kennedy**, **Le Vent du Nord**, **Tony McManus**, **J.P. Cormier**, **Liz Carroll**, **Gordie Sampson** and **The**



The Dhuks: l to r – Leonard Podolak, Jordan McConnell, Christian Dugas, Sarah Dugas and Tania Elizabeth



Nuala Kennedy

Once. Tickets can be purchased online at www.smallhalls.com or by phone at 902-892-2308.



Victoria, BC, has a new folk festival, the first in almost a decade. FolkWest makes its debut Aug. 19-21 in the city's Royal Athletic Park and features the likes of **Ron Sexsmith, Barney Bentall, The Bills, Ruth Moody, Joy Kills Sorrow** and **Oliver Swain's Big Machine**. Funding for the event was largely generated through a number of benefit concerts hosted by a trio of volunteer friends: **Oliver Swain, Bryan Skinner** and **Joelle May**. Together they formed the Lower Island FolkFest Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to the presentation, preservation and promotion of traditional and contemporary folk music. Swain is now the festival's artistic director. Early passes are \$50 until June 21. Tickets are available at www.folkwest.ca.



Summerfolk, based in Owen Sound, ON, celebrates its 30th annual event Aug. 19-21. One of the most resilient festivals in the country, it has experienced rain in 20 out of its 30 years. Its 2011 lineup includes **Michael Jerome Browne, Ron Hynes, The Good Lovelies** and Australia's **The Little Stevies**.



The contents of the **Queen Mother's** eclectic record collection were recently made public in the U.K. And amongst her collection, housed in her summer residence in Castle Mey, Caithness, Scotland, were recordings by Canadian country star **Wilf Carter**, also known as **Montana Slim**. Other folk and roots records in her collection included **Mirk, Fiddler's Dram,**

Paul Simon and **The Desperadoes Steel Orchestra**, a calypso band from Trinidad. The Queen Mother died in 2002 aged 101.



Numerous anniversaries and birthdays dotted the folk landscape throughout the spring. The most touted, of course, **Bob Dylan** turning 70 on May 24. Red House Records celebrated the date with the release of *A Nod To Bob II*, a tribute album featuring the likes of **Eliza Gilkyson, Pieta Brown** and **The Pines** covering Dylan's songs. Red House released a similar album for his 60th birthday.

Singer/songwriter **Thea Gilmore** marked the occasion by releasing a cover version of his entire *John Wesley Harding* album.

Naturally enough, numerous media outlets paid homage leading up to the big day, including *Rolling Stone* magazine. It put Dylan on its cover for the 15th time. Articles included **U2's Bono** proclaiming *Highway 61 Revisited*, released in 1965, Dylan's greatest song ever. The magazine also produced a predictable Top 10 greatest covers list—**The Byrds: Mr. Tamborine Man; Jimi Hendrix: All Along The Watchtower** ... etc. For a bit of fun, editor **Roddy Campbell** selected an alternative *Penguin Eggs* Top 10. Check these tracks out:

Richie Havens: It's All Over Now Baby Blue; The Band: I Shall Be Released; Chris Smither: Desolation Row; Dave Van Ronk: He Was A Friend Of Mine; Leon Russell: Watching The River Flow; Richie Havens: Just Like A Woman; The Clancy Brothers: When The Ship Comes In; Odetta: Masters of War; Fairport Convention: The Ballad of Easy Rider. Christy Moore: A Song To Woody.



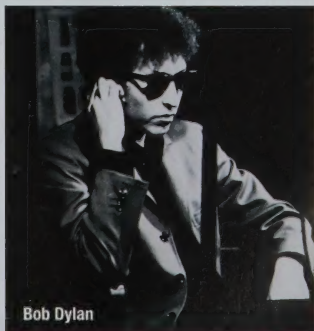
English folksinger **Martin Carthy** turned 70 on May 21. Carthy celebrated with a major concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, that featured the likes of **Tom Robinson, Dave Swarbrick** and Martin's daughter, **Eliza Carthy**. **Norma Waterson**, Martin's wife, continues to make progress after spending much of the winter seriously ill. Last November, she got an infection in her knee and went to the closest hospital for tests. Two days later she was on dialysis and a ventilator in intensive care. Waterson walked for the first time in almost four months in the middle of April.



The 100th anniversary of the birth of the most influential bluesman in history, **Robert Johnson**, fell on May 8. To mark the date, Sony Legacy released *Robert Johnson: The Complete Original Masters-Centennial Edition*, April 26. *The Complete Recordings*, a double-disc box set released by Sony/Columbia Legacy in 1990, won a Grammy Award for Best Historical Album and sold more than a million copies. Both sets include all 29 songs Johnson recorded in 1936 and 1937; although, *The Complete Recordings* had 12 out-takes. However, the latest release includes a hardbound book and vinyl 45-rpm replicas of Johnson's original 78 releases on Vocalion, Oriole, Conqueror and Perfect. Also included in this package is the DVD *The Life and Music of Robert Johnson: Can't You Hear the Wind Howl*, and an essay by a Texas-based historian. Johnson died Aug. 13, 1938, aged 27 but influenced generations of blues and rock guitarists including **Eric Clapton** and **Keith Richards**. Johnson was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986.



Wilf Carter



Bob Dylan



Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson

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**PRIX DE MUSIQUE
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Edmonton-based Stony Plain Records commemorated its 35th year in business with the release, May 10, of a CDs/DVD set, which consists of more than 40 tracks, several of which are previously unreleased, including four by the late Canadian singer/songwriter **Bob Carpenter**, four by bluesman **Robert Nighthawk** (recorded in a small Toronto studio 45 years ago, and possibly the last recordings he ever made), and one by **King Biscuit Boy**. There are 11 videos, including **Mako Funasaka's** heartfelt tribute to the late **Jeff Healey**.

Healey will be remembered in his home town of Etobicoke, ON, with a park named in his honour. Woodford Park, located in the Park Lawn and Queensway area of Etobicoke, will be officially renamed Jeff Healey Park in June.

Stony Plain president **Holger Petersen** also celebrated 25 years as host of CBC's *Saturday Night Blues* with an all-star, live concert in Vancouver that featured **Colin Linden** as emcee and musical director. It starred the likes of **Colin James** with his band, **Jim Byrnes**, **Tom Lavin** and **Shakura S'Aida** with **Donna Grantis**. CBC Radio will air the show in the fall, and some of the photos and film that was shot will be available on www.cbc.ca/snb

Borealis, Canada's leading folk music label, turns 15 years old this year. The label plans to mark the occasion with a photo exhibition at the Ontario Council of Folk Festival's annual convention in Niagara Falls, Oct. 13-16. "We have shots from our launch at the CBC's **Glenn Gould Studio**, we have photos of [**Gordon Lightfoot** coming to our launch of *Beautiful*, etc., etc.," says Borealis co-owner **Grit Laskin**.

The company also hopes to film for live-stream broadcasting several CD launch concerts this fall.

The fascinating 50 year-old documentary *Sunday* can now be viewed at <http://web.me.com/dandrasin/Dansworld/Films/Pages/Sunday.html>. It deals with the protest for the right to sing folk songs in Washington Square Park. Folk musicians had gathered in the park on Sundays to jam and sing since the 1940s, but on April 9, 1961, the police came to kick them out. The event became known as the Beatnik Riot.

Filmmaker **Dan Drasin** captured the incident on video equipment he'd borrowed from his bosses, cinema verite pioneers **D.A. Pennebaker** and **Albert Maysles**. It shows the likes of **Izzy Young** arguing with the police and singing **Woody Guthrie's** *This Land Is Your Land*. Young ran the Folklore Center on MacDougal Street, a few blocks away from the park. At the time, it was the heart of the Greenwich Village folk scene. Drasin considers the protest representative of the era to come, when people would confront established authority and hold them accountable. "[This protest] would've been unthinkable in the 1950s. But this was the beginning of the 1960s," he told NPR Radio.

The Ottawa Folk Festival has added an extra day of programming and changed its site from Britannia Park to Hog's Back Park. The festival runs from Aug. 25-28. The change of venue places the event in a more central location and makes it more accessible and viable, says festival supervisor **Mark Monahan**. He added that Hog's Back Park offers more flexibility in terms

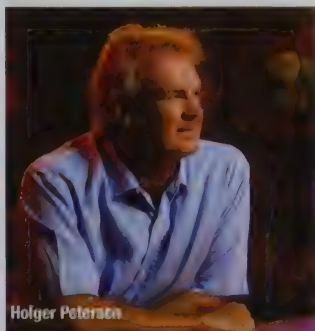
of space, sightlines, and stage settings.

Category winners at the 40th annual Juno Awards ceremonies held in Toronto, ON, March 26-27 include: Roots and Traditional Album of the Year (Group): **Le Vent du Nord, La part du feu** (Borealis); Roots and Traditional Album of the Year (Solo): **Old Man Luedecke, My Hands Are On Fire and Other Love Songs** (Black Hen); Blues Album of the Year: **Jim Byrnes, Everywhere West** (Black Hen); World Music Album of the Year: **Élégie Diouf, Aksil** (Takka).

Two years after his death, **John Martyn's** final recordings are set for release. Collectively titled *Heaven On Earth*, the guests include **Phil Collins** singing on a cover of his song *Can't Turn Back the Years* and **Garth Hudson** adds accordion to Martyn's *Stand Amazed*. He died in January 2009.

An as-yet-untitled John Martyn tribute album is set for release July 12. It will feature the likes of **Beck**, **David Gray**, **Beth Orton**, **Snow Patrol**, **Paolo Nutini** and **Devendra Banhart**.

Rounder Records released, April 19, *The Live Wire*, **Woody Guthrie's** only known live recording. One of the most significant recent finds in folk music history came to light in 2001 when the Woody Guthrie Archives received two spools of wire recordings from his performance in Newark, NJ, in 1949. With the help of several recording engineers, the delicate wire recordings were transferred to digital audio and, with state-of-the-art technology, restored to near-perfection.



Holger Petersen



John Martyn



Old Man Luedecke

Swansongs



Joe Willie (Pinetop) Perkins

Joe Willie (Pinetop) Perkins 1913 - 2011

Blues musician Joe Willie (Pinetop) Perkins, who this year became the oldest person ever to win a Grammy Award, died in his sleep at his Austin home, March 21, age 97, writes Roddy Campbell.

A sideman for most of his career, Perkins played with the likes of Sonny Boy Williamson II, Robert Nighthawk, B.B. King and Earl Hooker before, most notably, replacing Otis Spann in the Muddy Waters band in 1969. With Waters he played concerts and festivals all over the world. They also appeared on the film of The Band's final concert, *The Last Waltz*.

In 1980, however, Perkins and Waters parted ways due to a dispute over wages. Perkins took most of the group with him and for a few years they worked as the Legendary Blues Band.

Perkins was born on July 7, 1913, in Belzoni, MS, and grew up on the Honey Island plantation. His parents separated when he was six. While he taught himself the rudiments of blues guitar on a homemade instrument, Perkins concentrated exclusively on the piano after an incident, in 1943, in which a dancer at a juke joint attacked him with a knife, severing the tendons in his left arm.

And he began to pattern his keyboard playing on the recordings of Clarence (Pine Top) Smith, whose *Pine Top's Boogie*

Woogie (1928) had been instrumental in accelerating the flourishing craze for boogie-woogie. It also provided him with his nickname.

Perkins moved to Helena, AK, in 1943 to work with Robert Nighthawk. From there Sonny Boy Williamson II poached him to play with his King Biscuit Boys, before Perkins moved on to work with slide guitarist Earl Hooker.

Pinetop Perkins did not release an album under his own name until aged 75. From then until his death he made more than a dozen records. His 2008 album, *Pinetop Perkins & Friends*, included contributions from admirers like Eric Clapton and Jimmie Vaughan. Perkins was given a Grammy Award for lifetime achievement in 2005 and first won a Grammy for *Last of the Great Mississippi Delta Bluesmen: Live in Dallas*, a collaboration with his contemporaries Henry Townsend, Robert Lockwood Jr. and Honeyboy Edwards. He won again in February for his collaboration, *Joined at the Hip*, with drummer Willie (Big Eyes) Smith. *Born in the Honey*, a documentary about Perkins's life, was released in 2007.

Elton John, Billy Joel and Gregg Allman have all said they were influenced by Perkins's exuberant, down-home style of playing. And it is generally acknowledged he taught Ike Turner how to play the piano.

Hazel Dickens 1935 - 2011

While Hazel Dickens's music straddled folk, bluegrass and country, her passionate and eloquent songs often reflected the hardships of the mining families struggling to make ends meet in the coalfields of West Virginia. Their struggles she encapsulated in such songs as *Black Lung*, *They'll Never Keep Us Down* and *Will Jesus Wash The Bloodstains From Your Hands*. Dickens also championed feminist issues through the likes of her *Working Girl Blues*, *Don't Put Her Down You Put Her There* and *You'll Get No More of Me*.

Hazel Jane Dickens died April 22 in Washington, DC, due to complications from pneumonia. She was 75, writes Roddy Campbell.

The roots of Dickens's songs are authentic. She was born June 1, 1935, in Mercer County, WV, one of 11 children in a family so poor that finding enough food to eat was often a struggle. Three of her brothers died in mining-related incidents. She learned about music from her father, an occasional banjo player and Baptist minister, who drove truck for a mining company to earn a living. Uncle Dave Macon, the Monroe Brothers and the Carter Family were early influences adopted from the family radio.

To escape the crippling poverty of the coalfields, the family moved to Baltimore and Hazel worked in a factory making tin cans. She and her siblings often attended old-time festivals arranged by displaced country folk, as well as picking parties. She bought a bass guitar to play alongside her musical brothers. She also started to sing in public and met Mike Seeger. Together they



formed The Strange Creek Singers, whose ranks also included Seeger's future wife, Alice Gerrard. Dickens went on to play bass with The Greenbriar Boys and The Pike County Boys before forming a duet with Gerrard.

Their first recordings for Folkways offered the unprecedented sound of a female duet singing bluegrass. And their albums for Rounder Records—*Hazel & Alice* (1973) and *Hazel Dickens & Alice Gerrard* (1976)—would go on to influence the likes of Emmylou Harris, The Judds and Alison Krauss.

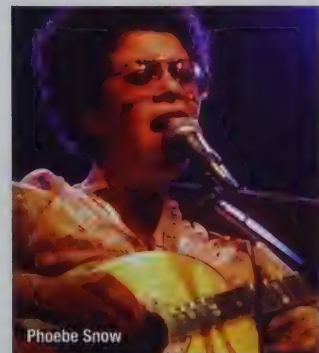
In 1976, Dickens contributed four tracks to Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, USA*, a chilling Academy Award-winning documentary about the Brookside Mine strike in Kentucky in the early '70s. Dickens also appeared in a haunting graveyard scene singing *Beautiful Hills of Galilee* in the movie *Matewan* (1987).

She went on to sing with the Johnson Mountain Boys and the Nashville Bluegrass Band. Her autobiographical *Mama's Hand* was named bluegrass song of the year in 1996, after it appeared on an album by the Lynn Morris Band.

Phoebe Snow 1935 - 2011

Singer/songwriter Phoebe Snow, who gained celebrity status with her 1974 self-titled album that featured the hit single *Poetry Man*, died April 26 in Edison, NJ. She was 60, writes Roddy Campbell.

Blessed with a multi-octave voice, she was born Phoebe Ann Laub in New York City but grew up in Teaneck, NJ. She took up the guitar in her teens and began performing in Greenwich Village's coffee



houses. At the Bitter End she was discovered in 1972 by Dino Airali, a promotion executive for Leon Russell's Shelter Records. Her debut self-titled album featured the likes of Zoot Sims, The Persuasions and Teddy Wilson. Propelled by the success of the single *Poetry Man*, the album reached No. 4 in the U.S. and generated a Grammy nomination for best new artist. Snow appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone* and was feted as one of the most promising singer/songwriters of the era, touring as an opening act for both Jackson Browne and Paul Simon.

She featured prominently on Simon's 1975 single *Gone at Last* and also sang backup vocals on his hit *50 Ways to Leave Your Lover*. Snow moved to Columbia Records and her album, *Second Childhood* (1976), went gold.

In December 1975, however, she gave birth to a daughter, Valerie Rose, who had severe brain damage and other disabilities. Despite advice to place Valerie in an institution, Snow put her musical aspirations aside to care for her daughter. Protracted lawsuits with various labels also stalled her career momentum throughout most of the '80s. She eventually released *Something Real* in 1989 and took jobs singing advertising jingles. While she sang at the 25th anniversary of Woodstock in 1994 as part of a group that included Mavis Staples, Thelma Houston and CeCe Peniston, it wasn't until the death of Valerie in 2007, that Snow began to actively perform again.

John Bottomley 1960 - 2011

Juno Award-winning singer/songwriter John Bottomley died April 6 near his home in Brackendale, BC. He was 50, writes Roddy Campbell

Bottomley had left for a walk from his home and when he failed to return, a search was undertaken by local authorities. The coroner's report has concluded that John took his own life and a family spokesperson has confirmed that he had recently been suffering from depression.

Bottomley was born in Toronto, ON, in 1960. His father was a member of the Canadian Forces and the family travelled extensively throughout Europe and Canada. In England, John studied piano. In Germany, he bought his first guitar and played



in a band for the first time. Back in Toronto in 1981, John, his brother Chris Bottomley and Mike Severin put together Tulpa, pioneers of Toronto's Queen Street indie-rock scene that eventually enjoyed regular gigs at such venues as New York City's CBGBs. They were briefly managed by its owner, Hilly Krystal.

John Bottomley launched his solo career in 1990 with *Library of the Sun*. It caught the attention of BMG Music Canada, which released his Juno Award-winning album *Songs with the Ornamental Hermits* and the followup, *Blackberry*, which produced the Top 10 hit *You Lose You Gain*.

While he never regained the commercial success of his initial solo recordings, his 1998 release *Raggle Taggle* was the first professional Pro Tools recording ever made. Bottomley moved to Bowen Island, BC, in 2000 and continued to release a series of largely acoustic albums. His last recording was *The Healing Dream*, which came out in November 2010.

Penguin Eggs also notes other passings in brief: legendary and notorious music producer Huey P. Meaux, "The Crazy Cajun," died April 23 aged 82. Meaux produced hits for the likes of Doug Sahm and Freddy Fender. Actor and musician Gil Robbins, a member of the 1960s folk group The Highwaymen, who also toured with Tom Paxton and the Cumberland Three, died April 5 aged 80. Outstanding Scottish Gaelic singer and heritage campaigner Ishbel MacAskill died March 31 aged 70.



Nicolas Pellerin: *Les Grands Hurleurs*

Nicolas Pellerin et les Grands Hurleurs

Nicolas Pellerin can remember the precise moment when he started to play fiddle. It was a quarter past midnight on Dec. 26, 1999. Pellerin was 19 at the time—a relatively late age to pick up the instrument—and studying maths at university. So began a beautiful obsession that has led him to become one of the hottest performers on the trad-based scene in Quebec. “When I got back to school after the holidays all I could think about was playing fiddle,” he recalls with a quick laugh. “I really got hooked. It wasn’t long before I left college and devoted myself completely to the instrument to make up for lost time. I played eight hours a day every day, for years and years.”

Pellerin is a powerful fiddler, with fire in his fingers, but he also possesses a keen musical intelligence and sensitivity to the nuances of a tune. He played for a while in the young trad band Les Langues Fourchues, whose lineup includes Evelyne Gélinas of *Galant tu perds ton temps*. Then Yves Lambert, former frontman of *La Bottine Souriante*, hired Pellerin to be a member of his Bébert Orchestra, and word of his prowess spread.

In 2007 Nicolas teamed up with his older sibling Fred, a hugely popular storyteller

in Quebec, to make an album. Even though they didn’t do any shows together, the brothers sold an astonishing 45,000 copies of *Fred et Nicolas Pellerin*, and bagged a Félix Award, Quebec’s equivalent of the Junos. Spurred by this achievement, Nicolas decided to leave the Bébert Orchestra and strike out in his own direction, forming Nicolas Pellerin et les Grands Hurleurs with guitarist Simon Marion and bassist Simon Lepage.

Les Grands Hurleurs (the Big Howlers) take their name from an ill-fated French warship that’s the protagonist of the old naval ballad *Corsaire (Buccaneer)*, one of the highlights of the trio’s self-titled debut.

“We called the band Les Grands Hurleurs because we wanted something that represented the energy and character of our sound. Howling for me is a cry from the heart, something that’s deep and true—and transmits.”

Pellerin’s approach to folk is not purist. The arrangements of old songs like *Rosignolet* and *Malmariée* draw on jazz and funk to give them new vitality.

Corsaire is brilliantly re-imagined musically, with changes of instrumentation and shifts of tempo maintaining interest and adding to the intensity of the lengthy and

gripping narrative. As on the album’s other songs, Pellerin sings the lead, with a strong and penetrating voice that has a nasal resonance, evoking maritime traditions from western France and Brittany.

Nicolas Pellerin et les Grands Hurleurs also garnered a Félix, and the three musicians began touring internationally. They’re currently in the studio working on their second album.

“The success of the first recording has created a good kind of pressure on us to deliver something special. All of the instrumental tunes will be original, written by me or by the two Simons. The songs are still traditional in their texts, but while we’re anchored in that repertoire the music is moving farther away from the old structures, and we’re using things like string quartets. It will be readily accessible, but at the same time pretty wild and out-there for a folk album.”

—By Tony Montague

Lindi Ortega

“There’s a bird on my head,” says Lindi Ortega. The Toronto-based singer, whose distinctive new album *Little Red Boots* belongs in the collection of every self-respecting alt-country fan, is referring to Skippy, her green-cheeked conure. A member of the parrot family, the bird, says Ortega, is a “jokester” who delights in



Lindi Ortega

knocking things off the table.

There are no songs about Skippy on her new record but there is one called *Blue Bird*. Ortega's vocals on this and some other tracks recall Dolly Parton's girlish soprano, and the song itself—about the relief that music, whether avian or human, can bring to a saddened heart—hearkens back to vintage Parton.

"It's a bright song in a kind of dark album," says Ortega, her ready laugh not one you'd immediately associate with someone who writes tunes with titles like *So Sad* or *Dying of Another Broken Heart*.

On the other hand, Ortega does like to surprise: the rockabilly *I'm No Elvis Presley*, like the title track with its reference to her trademark footwear, brims with attitude and good humour. And the album has a deliberate 1950s Sun Studio feel to it that's pleasingly unexpected.

Happy to continue chatting about birds, Ortega says she's fascinated by things that fly. "Wings are a symbol of freedom, I guess." Had she not been a musician, she's sure she would have been an ornithologist or a storm chaser.

Fortunately for fans, she opted for musician. Just as fortunately, she's also determined enough to have stuck with her career for the decade it's taken to produce the album that should finally get her the attention she merits.

Over that decade, she released two other albums and an EP. She once had a contract with Cherrytree/Interscope Records, home of Lady Gaga and Feist. She even worked for a staffing agency that specialized in accounting placements. "I felt like I was playing a role in a movie. I had to dress and act the part, and that got really old."

Now Ortega's back to what she does best: being independent (she is on the Last Gang Records label, but likes that they basically leave her alone). In fact, she's long been known as Indie Lindi.

Mostly because she didn't have much cash to spare, she early on learned to do her own album photography and website design. Much of the photography and design for the current album is hers. That includes the bird skull painting inside the cover, inspired by Day of the Dead art, it signals her love of Mexican culture and her pride in having a father who is Mexican.

Her independent spirit, she says, comes

from having been an only child and learning to do things on her own. Her music "speaks to the loner in me," a comfort with being solitary. That same comfort can translate into the intense loneliness that she sometimes feels and captures so well in her music.

But she's quick to stress that the album includes some upbeat tunes. "I didn't want to put a complete album out of depressing songs or wallow in the darkness. I wanted to say, 'Let's try to find the silver lining'."

—By Pat Langston

Oh My Darling

The career of Winnipeg quartet Oh My Darling is on a steeply rising curve. This spring the roots-based band set off on a six-week European tour, taking it to the U.K., Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and Germany, culminating in a Canada Day performance in London's Trafalgar Square in front of a huge crowd. Not bad for four young women who only got together a few short years ago.

"It all started when our guitarist, Vanessa Kuzina, who had a career as a singer/songwriter, was preparing to make a solo album," says fiddler Rosalyn Dennett. "She brought in Allison [de Groot], who was playing old-time clawhammer-style

banjo, and MJ [Marie-Josée Dandeneau] our standup bassist. They made a really strong musical and personal connection, and Allison had the idea of forming an old-time stringband. So she began looking for someone to play fiddle and invited me to a secret audition with the band—pretending it was just a jam!"

The canny girls quickly realized Dennett was the right candidate. She'd studied Métis fiddle in northern Manitoba, and spent a year in Galway learning Irish styles with former Danu member Jesse Smith. Like the others, she is a big fan of Appalachian and bluegrass music. But she and her new colleagues drew inspiration from contemporary sources, too—above all U.S. all-girl stringband Uncle Earl and fellow Manitobans the Wailin' Jennys and The Duhks. Soon after forming they realized they, too, wanted to take things in a similarly eclectic direction.

"Vanessa had this wealth of songs, and Allison and I started to write as well, so the focus shifted," says Dennett. "We really expanded our musical vocabulary, and what we were able to do with arrangements of the material to give it a broader appeal."

Success was swift. Oh My Darling built a strong local fan base, with the energy and visual appeal of its shows, and a self-titled EP released in 2009 bagged a Western Ca-



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Old Man Luedecke

"My Hands Are On Fire and Other Love Songs"

Juno Award for Roots/Traditional

Solo Album of the Year



Jim Byrnes

"Everywhere West"

Juno Award for

Blues Album of the Year

Nominated for
"DVD of the Year" at the
Blues Awards in Memphis



The Mississippi Sheiks

Tribute Concert "Live in Vancouver"

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nadian Music Award for Best Roots Album. A year later the quartet recorded its acclaimed full-length debut *In the Lonesome Hours*, a mix of old-time favourites such as *Roustabout* and *Sail Away Ladies*, and new compositions such as Kuzina's catchy and intelligent country-pop song *Caught You Looking* and the gorgeous *Won't Need My Shoes (On Heaven's Floor)*.

The gigs proliferated and the women grew rapidly as musicians. Recently, Oh My Darling was back in the studio, with Vancouver producer Steve Dawson at the helm, to make its second album, due this summer.

"It's called *Sweet Nostalgia* and as the title suggests this time there's going to be more of a traditional feel," says Dennett. "A lot of our original songwriting harks back to older styles, and for the first time we have some Cajun in the mix, with a song by Dewey Balfa. We aspire to be versatile, crossing genres easily, but are aware of the danger that can pose of becoming jacks-of-all-trades. We're working hard to combine all of our collective experience and knowledge to create a sound that's natural, cohesive, and our own. It's a very exciting process for all of us to be involved in."

— By Tony Montague

Scott Cook

"Saskatchewan rappers sound like they're from Compton, and for the reggae singers it's the Caribbean.

"If you're country it's Houston or old San Antonio; or any old place but your very own.

"That's what they're callin' authentic, couldn't even say what they mean if they meant it.

"They never told me their secrets, they never let themselves be known."

Above is the recipe for Scott Cook's musical existence, found in the first few lines of his warm, nostalgic and bright new album *Moonlit Rambles*. Having emerged from West Virginia, settled cozily in Edmonton and travelled as widely as the budget would allow in between, Cook has become a local magnet of sorts in the last half-decade. Like some kindly, be-dreaded, purring lion, the 34-year-old folk musician is one of the most inclusive people in the city, herding and encouraging a collective scene within which he denies any "leadership" role.



For him, putting together a gig with 25 musicians or the soon-to-be three *Great Northern Revival* compilations is work worth doing, yes, but always together. "It's just a great family of people," he says, listing 15 or so off the top of his head.

Getting back to the opening quote about musical credibility and revealing who you really are, Cook's contact-pedigree includes everything from American blues to Canadian country, with a hell of a lot of backseat political reading. Besides a shot at hipsters with ironic sweaters and moustaches, I should mention it's the most scolding we find on an album otherwise erupting with love (except for landlords, which we'll get to). But Cook comes by his music, luckily enough, naturally.

"I grew up all over the Prairies, got a philosophy degree in Edmonton. I moved to Taiwan for six years, then came home and have been playing music full time for four years."

Combine the philosophy paper with Asian survival skills and it begins to explain Cook's overarching sense of calm, found everywhere in his wistful music.

"Taiwan's fricking insane," he laughs. "Maybe it calmed me out in that way, I don't know.

"I write about my life, so there are a lot of songs about being on the road, which is

pretty common. Even when I was growing up my family would take us on long road trips—a lot of my family's in Michigan, so we'd drive across the country to visit them. It plugs into my writing in this sense: by going away you can see your own place for what it is. Maybe in a better way, you know what I mean?"

Defining what he means by home, Cook lists off Edmonton, Taiwan, Michigan and, "as cliché as it may sound, the road is a home for me. Whenever I get back on it I feel, ah, what a relief."

The album is full of great and personal songs, including a dreamy theme for the annual North Country Fair, up near Driftpile, AB—best music festival around. One of Cook's typical farewells is "See you at the Fair." But another song custom-built for Fair types is the jaunty *The Lord Giveth (And the Landlord Taketh Away)*. In between songs about moonlit walks and love, is a wicked attack on the ever-growing distance between humans and corporations.

"There is a lot of stuff going on out there that it seems we can't do anything about, but we have to try. We wouldn't have gotten as far as we have (in a good way) if other people hadn't."

You can find Scott's music (and political links) at scottcook.net.

— By Fish Growsky

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Ben Sures

If it's true that early experiences shape our personality, then you could say folkie Ben Sures is simply getting in touch with his inner "global citizen".

That's his way of explaining the mini-musical travelogue embodied in the expansive but intimate fifth studio album *Gone To Bolivia*. Sures covers more ground than ever before on the CD, propelled by an acute observer's eye and a restless spirit that has taken him places either in body or in mind.

"I think I get it from my dad—he dreams about travelling—and from travelling to perform. My life has roots in many places, and sometimes I feel it's my job to remind people that in other countries there are people who want the same things we do."

Over a dozen tracks, Sures's mix of pointed social commentary, dark humour, and poignant storytelling addresses poverty in America, the legacy of Columbus, trying to survive in Burma, and how Che Guevara's face has become a commercial for radical chic. We hear the true story of a native boy who escaped residential school and, of course, how love starts and ends.

"Because I have a broad range of influences, I wanted it to be Amy Winehouse meets Tim O'Brien," he jokes.

On a more serious note, he admits to a bit of hero worship: "I could read Woody Guthrie's *Bound For Glory* over and over."

Currently based in Edmonton, Sures was conceived in Japan, born in Saskatchewan and brought up across the Canadian Prairies with extended stays in Britain, parts of Europe, California and Grenada. Both his parents were visual artists and big fans of the Winnipeg Folk Music Festival so it wasn't a stretch that he started crafting songs with a guitar around age 14, or that he decided to devote his life to a career in song about a year later.

While his parents' travels did a lot to expand his vision of the world (inspiring the song *Rambling Bones*), Sures says he owes another debt to producer Mitch Podolak, who he eventually came to befriend after the family moved to Winnipeg.

"Between the folk fest and hundreds of shows at the West End Cultural Centre, Mitch created a few things that were pretty much the foundation of my education. I got to see people like Odetta and Tom Paxton and Stan Rogers live and I loved the atmosphere and the down-to-earth way these icons related to the audience."

Sures became a fixture on the scene before his career took him west to live in Edmonton and Vancouver, east to Toronto and Montreal, and occasionally back to Winnipeg over the years. His 1994 debut disc, *No Absolutes*, was recorded in Calgary under the guidance of Tim Williams, and while his sound has evolved much since then the guitarist-singer feels he remains loosely grounded in folk blues. Along the way he won the folk category in

the 2005 John Lennon Songwriting Competition, and the International Songwriter's Competition the following year.

Gone To Bolivia was recorded in Toronto with producer Don Kerr, a cast of musical friends and Sures's own acoustic and electric guitars, resulting in something more exotic than his previous efforts. Sures says his inadvertent, thematic nod to transience and travel has also brought him to a new creative plateau.

"I feel like I've scratched the surface of something and figured out the songwriter I want to be. It's very exciting because I can finally execute the ideas in my head."

— By Roger Levesque

Angus and Kenneth MacKenzie

Kenneth MacKenzie and his brother, Angus, grew up in tiny Mabou Mines, a little village clinging to the picturesque seaside on Cape Breton's Inverness County. Their mother, Maureen, was a Rankin from Mabou and their father, Ronald, came directly from South Uist in the Scottish Hebrides, descended from the legendary piping Currie family. The pair met while Maureen was in Scotland to pursue her studies of Gaelic.

"She ended up on dad's home island, and that was the end of that," says Kenneth,

27, with a wry sense of humour as dry as a mouthful of fiddle rosin. The MacKenzie household was awash with Gaelic, often welcoming visiting Gaelic scholars to the home.

The young MacKenzies are accomplished on both the bagpipes and the fiddle, swapping effortlessly between the reeds and strings. They are at the forefront of the next generation of Cape Breton musicians, carrying the torch for the ancient Gaelic style of piping and fiddling.

"I think the [Gaelic-speaking] lends a certain honesty and integrity to the music—we're just trying to be true to the culture," says Kenneth.

The boys have maintained their trans-Atlantic connection. Kenneth spent a year studying on Skye, following in the footsteps of his older brother, Angus, 31. Kenneth returned to Mabou but Angus has remained on Skye for 15 years. The brilliant young piper brought the robust and rhythmic style of Cape Breton piping back to Scotland with the Western Isles band Daimh.

The big pipes were once as popular as the fiddle in Cape Breton, providing the lively reels, jigs and strathspeys for the famous square sets at the dancehalls. Over the past 40 years, the fiddle has emerged as the dominant instrument of choice for the traditional music of Cape Breton, attributable in great measure to the influential 1972 documentary *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*.

"That resurgence for the fiddle never really

happened for the pipes, especially the old Gaelic-style. That last of those old-style pipers sort of died out within the last 15 years."

So the MacKenzies are doing their part to reinvigorate the old style of playing.

"That style was closer to the fiddle music of the dances rather than the band competition style of piping," says Kenneth. "The old piping style and the fiddle were quite similar—having a Gaelic feel and being more directed at getting people up to dance."

Kenneth and Angus pooled their considerable talents recently to record *Piob is Fìdheall (Pipes and Fiddle)*, a wonderful collection of instrumental pieces culled from the traditional canon as well as some contemporary pieces by Cape Breton composers. The album is available through their own Mabou Mines Records.

"We wanted to explore that relationship between the fiddle and the pipes, how at one point they were more interchangeable. A lot of the dance-style pipers were also fiddlers. They'd bring out the pipes if the event was outdoors, or perhaps the dance was a little louder."

Pulling the tunes together for the album became a real trans-Atlantic challenge. Though they grew up in the same home as children, Angus has lived in Scotland the past 15 years. So the pair independently prepared sets of favourite tunes, and traded ideas through e-mail.

"We picked at it for months. Angus brought the set of Skye jigs because that's where he's living, and there's a set with more my type of tunes. There's also a tune for our mother we wanted to play, written by piper John MacLean of Washabuck."

Last summer, they finally connected at Lakewind Studio in Point Aconi, Cape Breton, ran through the sets a couple of times, and recorded them live off the floor—just fiddle and pipes. Later they called in some musical friends to add rhythm tracks on some pieces, including little brother Calum and Mac Morin on piano.

The music bursts with vitality, tremendous musicality and seamless interplay between Kenneth's fiddle and Angus's big highland pipes and whistles.

"We had no problem meshing together 'cause we grew up playing together," says Kenneth. "It was very natural for us to get back into the music like that."

— By Sandy MacDonald



Angus and Kenneth MacKenzie



Gregg Allman

Allman Joy

After years in an artistic no-man's land, Gregg Allman marks a triumphant return to form with the release of the T Bone Burnett-produced album, *Low Country Blues*. Peter North provides the ... erm, lowdown.

If ever a life defined what we refer to as "the blues" and all that entails, look no farther than Gregg Allman's.

It's all there, documented in one way or another, the complete combination of triumph and tragedy, be it personal or professional. In the case of Gregg Allman, there is little that separates the two.

The welcome news is that the latest chapter in this singer, songwriter and bandleader's roller-coaster journey looks to be adding much to the triumph side of the ledger, while creating a large buffer zone from the tragic side of life.

One of those triumphs is *Low Country Blues*, his first solo album in more than 15 years and a recording that has been hailed by many blues aficionados as "the blues event of the last decade".

One listen to the album and it is im-

mediately clear that Allman's emotionally charged voice, which has tugged on hell-bent lines of lyric with the determination of a team of 40 mules and alternately soothed souls with an understated, haunting restraint, remains his ace.

Thanks to a successful liver transplant a year ago, Allman is in the kind of physical shape that allows him to settle behind his Hammond B3 organ, lean into his microphone, and put a mighty grip on every song he chooses to sing over the course of three hours, whether it be with "the Brothers" or fronting his solo shows. Gregg Allman, for the first time in his adult life, is also clean and sober.

Produced by T Bone Burnett, the 12-song *Low Country Blues* is a swampy, low-down set of timeless tunes pulled from the songbooks of legendary bluesmen such as Sleepy John Estes, Muddy Waters, Skip James, Magic Sam, Amos Milburn, Otis Rush and B.B. King.

Covers? Maybe and yes they fit the description, but this is music that is in Allman's DNA.

While material of this nature has had a place in the Allman Brothers' voluminous songbook, straight-up hardcore blues has always been one part of the Allman blend that leans on jazz-influenced improvisation, psychedelic

twists and extended blues-rock rumbles.

Looking back on a 1992 interview I conducted with Allman and fellow Brother Warren Haynes, Allman talked of producer Tom Dowd. Dowd had been with the band in that capacity since shortly after Duane Allman brought the crew together in Macon, GA, in the late '60s.

"Tom is like our father, he always went for it with us, and when Butch (Trucks) and Dickie (Betts) began talking about putting the band back together, Tom thought we still had it in us. Tom thought we should give it a try," stated Allman, who at that time was a much more withdrawn and tormented man than he is today.

With Dowd's passing in 2002, Allman was left without that guide and father figure in the studio. Searching for a new producer was not a mission the musician relished and as he says, "there's nothing I hate more than having to replace members of the band. Getting a new producer is like getting a new guy in the band, and they either make it or break it by sundown."

A phone call from his manager at the end of an Allman Brothers 2010 tour was his first introduction to the name T Bone Burnett.

"We were at the top of the country, Detroit or Minneapolis, and my manager requested I stop in Memphis. There was someone he wanted me to meet. I was tired and wanted to get home to Savannah but I agreed to stop. I'm so glad I did," recalls Allman, who would meet Burnett for breakfast.

"I swear I had never even heard T Bone's name, but I knew some of his work like the *O, Brother* soundtrack. We got to talkin' and I asked him what he was doin' in Memphis and he told me about the soundtrack for the *Crazy Heart* film. But he also brought two builders with him to Memphis. They were measuring the Sun Records Studio for him, board by board and they were going to build a replica of Sun Records on his property in California."

Allman thought that was one of the hippest things he'd ever heard. As the two conversed about recording techniques, Burnett started talking about his appreciation for Tom Dowd.

"I thought, 'Man, this guy just might be all right'. That's when I began wondering why I had never heard his name. I guess it's that sheltered life of mine," chortled Allman, with that combination of a hearty

Tubthumping On Solid Ground

laugh and raspy cough.

Burnett would eventually send Allman 25 blues tunes, which the singer pared to 15. Allman agreed to head to California to record with Burnett but almost balked when Burnett told Allman that he would not be needing his band for the sessions.

Almost a deal breaker, the singer once again laughs and recalls saying to Burnett, "let me think about this, and I'll call you back", but under his breath he admits he was punctuating the comment with "maybe".

When Allman eventually arrived in California he was tickled that his old friend Mac Rebennack, a.k.a. Dr. John, had been hired to play piano and guitarist Doyle Bramhall II was also on the session.

"Clapton had introduced me to Doyle, who is great, but I didn't know drummer Jay Bellorose or Dennis Crouch, who played upright bass. I had never recorded with an upright player before and something in a vocal comes through a lot better when you are recording with an acoustic bass. I dunno, it takes some of the highs off the vocal, and on this record you can almost hear me breathing. I thought, 'Ain't this a kick, I might use acoustic bass on every recording session from now on'."

The *Low Country Blues* sessions quickly became a "mutual admiration society", and Allman is, a few months after the release of the disc, still thrilled with the results.

One of many highlights on the disc is his take on the Skip James-penned *Devil Go My Woman*. The take finds Allman singing in a higher register than we are accustomed to hearing, but as he says, "that's just what fell out when I started to record and I wasn't trying to put any inflections into the take. It's real spooky; a lot of those tunes are."

The lone original on the set is *Just Another Rider*, a co-write with fellow Allman Brother Warren Haynes.

"Warren and I have a really good rapport with each other. There's no hurrying; it might take us all day to get a verse. We try everything. Phrasing has so much to do with songwriting. That's the percussion end of the song, the lyric has to do a magical thing with the music. In the end, there's as many ways to write songs as there are songs."

The *Low Country Blues* sessions clicked with such precision that the three weeks Allman and Burnett had blocked off was distilled to 12 days and Allman was back

on the plane to Atlanta. This summer, Allman is out on the road with his group touring behind the disc, rolling through sets that wash over every chapter of his astonishing career that got its start in south Florida when he was a mere kid.

It's close to half a century since Gregg Allman was taken under the wing of Florida bluesman Floyd Miles, who heard something in a young white teenager's voice that convinced him that the young man's calling was not singing the surf songs of the day.

"It was Floyd who saw the potential of R&B and blues in me, took me to record stores and turned me on to Motown and Atlantic Records. Artists like Jimmy Witherspoon, John Lee Hooker, Sonny Boy and B.B. After that, every two dollars I got I spent on the black side of town," recalls Allman as if it were only yesterday.

So we have the late-Floyd Miles to thank for pointing Gregg Allman down this musical path and we have T Bone Burnett to thank for nudging Gregg Allman back into the studio.

"As for me, I thank God every day for this voice and these opportunities," says the man who was blessed with one of the greatest instruments in the history of blues music.

The Queen and Sean Connery are among those to recently pay tribute to Scottish songwriter Dougie MacLean. MacLean's remarkable recording career spans more than three-and-a-half decades. Alan Kellogg catches up with an old friend from rural Perthshire, Scotland.

In the plaintive song *All Who Wander* that closes out his new album *Resolution*, Dougie MacLean sings of one who "once walked this road with youth as my guide," "on the start of some journey that seemed so crystal and clear," "holding forever as the years roll away."

If unintended, that classic songwriter's narrative might well be applied to the man himself.

At 56, the Scottish singer/songwriter finds himself in the centre of the elusive professional/personal sweet spot creative folk—not to mention the rest of us—rhapsodize over. That this happens to be a matter of fact known and savoured by old friends and fans as opposed to the standard press release dross only adds to the lustre,



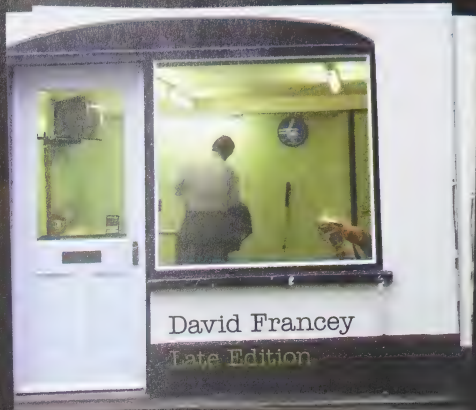
Dougie MacLean

Three-time Juno Award Winner

David Francey

ON TOUR

Fall Tour Dates in support of his
new release, "Late Edition"



DATE

Sat, Sept 17
Thurs, Sept 22
Fri, Sept 23
Sat, Sept 24
Wed, Sept 28
Thurs, Sept 29
Fri, Sept 30
Sat, Oct 1
Sun, Oct 2
Wed, Oct 5
Sat, Oct 8
Mon, Oct 10
Tues, Oct 11
Wed, Oct 12
Thurs, Oct 13
Fri, Oct 14
Sat, Oct 15
Sun, Oct 16
Mon, Oct 17
Tues, Oct 18
Wed, Oct 19
Thurs, Oct 20
Fri, Oct 21
Sat, Oct 22
Sun, Oct 23
Tues, Oct 25
Wed, Oct 26
Thurs, Oct 27
Fri, Oct 28
Sat, Oct 29
Sun, Oct 30
Mon, Oct 31
Sat, Nov 5
Sat, Nov 12
Sun, Nov 13
Fri, Nov 18
Sat, Nov 19
Sun, Nov 20
Tues, Nov 22
Wed, Nov 23
Thurs, Nov 24
Fri, Nov 25
Sat, Nov 26
Sun, Nov 27

VENUE

Octave Theatre
Piggery Theatre
The Black Sheep Inn
The Black Sheep Inn
Princess Cinema & Princess
Hugh's Room
Hugh's Room
London Music Club
Mackenzie Hall Centre
HECFI
Finlandia Club
Pappy's Café
TBA
West End Cultural Centre
Broadway Theatre
Transalta Arts Barn
Braeside Community Centre
Nancy Appleby Theatre
Second Street Theatre
Horizon Stage PAC
The Geomatic Attic
Auditorium Hotel
Southwood United Church
Bearberry Community Hall
Margaret Greenham Theatre
TBA
Creekside Theatre
Dream Café
St. James Community Hall
The Dancing Bean
Hermanns Jazz Club
Hermanns Jazz Club
Port Hardy Civic Centre
Ship Inn
Ship Inn
Charles W. Stockey Centre
Market Hall
Petit Campus
Harmony House
Marigold Cultural Centre
Murray Room
Membertou Center
Company House
Arena Complex Theatre

CITY

Kingston, Ontario
North Hatley, Quebec
Wakefield, Quebec
Wakefield, Quebec
Waterloo, Ontario
Toronto, Ontario
Toronto, Ontario
London, Ontario
Windsor, Ontario
Hamilton, Ontario
Thunder Bay, Ontario
Wabigoon, Ontario
Kenora, Ontario
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Edmonton, Alberta
Calgary, Alberta
Athabasca, Alberta
Grande Prairie, Alberta
Spruce Grove, Alberta
Lethbridge, Alberta
Nanton, Alberta
Calgary, Alberta
Bearberry, Alberta
Banff, Alberta
Invermere, British Columbia
Winfield, British Columbia
Penticton, British Columbia
Vancouver, British Columbia
Chemainus, British Columbia
Victoria, British Columbia
Victoria, British Columbia
Port Hardy, British Columbia
St. John's, Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland
Perry Sound, Ontario
Peterborough, Ontario
Montreal, Quebec
Hunter River, PEI
Truro, Nova Scotia
Pictou, Nova Scotia
Sydney, Nova Scotia
Halifax, Nova Scotia
St. Andrews, New Brunswick



More dates to be announced in the coming weeks.

www.DavidFrancey.com

LAKER MUSIC



to the charming improbability of it all.

With 36 years in the biz, the favourite son of Perthshire is notching another remarkable year. Kicking off 2011 in style, he joined Annie Lennox and Lady Antonia Fraser et al. making the Queen's Honours List with an Order of the British Empire (OBE) installation. Other kudos included the Danish Folk Award as well as his signature anthem *Caledonia* chosen as the vehicle for a splashy TV campaign promoting Scottish Homecoming, with the likes of Sean Connery, Lulu and Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond joining in song.

To boot—and with some cosmic justice—a MacLean/Caledonia brand single malt scotch whisky hit the shop racks, along with the new album and a performance DVD—*Dougie MacLean Songwriter*—as well as a growing emphasis on film and video production. The family's annual Perthshire Amber Festival continues grow by leaps and bounds and, of course, the musician's travelling life rolls on, taking the live show to the world's corners. He even made it into the iconic comic strip *The Broons* (*The Simpsons* for Scots). And talk about value added—the oak barrels used in the whisky are being sawn up to help create Dougie MacLean signature guitars!

It's all done with a family company including wife Jennifer, son Jamie and daughter Julia based in the same gorgeous Tay Valley that MacLean grew up in, son of a warden to the local laird.

In short, life is pretty bloody rosy for the Clan MacLean, as its ever-wry patriarch cheerfully acknowledges on the line from world headquarters in Butterstone.

A chill, snowy April morning in Alberta on the eve of the mega-hyped Royal Wedding contrasted mightily with the blooming cherry trees and lustily breeding pheasants outside MacLean's office in the family compound, much to the delight of the perennial Scottish booster.

"You've got to get out here—this is sun-burn weather. It's looks like global warming will be very beneficial to Scotland."

Catching up—we go back to the mid-'70s in the days of Edmonton's seminal South Side Folk Club—morphs into the business at hand and a delicious, irresistible irony. So then, how did one of Scotland's most passionate nationalists reconcile being awarded the same honour (by the same

English queen) once famously bestowed to the budding Beatles?

"Well, to tell you the truth, I thought it was a joke, that someone was having me on. It's bizarre, all right and I did spend a brief moment wondering if I should accept it. But then, you know, it's been a long, hard road of 36 years, and at least part of it dealt with the fact that I've brought people from all over to this place, creating good opportunities here. It was a recognition of that."

Well, having been dubbed by Her Majesty, what were the MacLean family plans for celebrating the nuptials of Kate and Will?

(Deadpan) "There is nothing special here planned. It's not something we're interested in." Right.

What is of interest is the wide range of projects Dougie Corp is up to. The new album *Resolution* certainly qualifies, and is actually getting some radio airplay, a rarity in the U.K. these days for a folk record. Longtime fans will recognize the familiar, trusted brand and find comfort in the album, captained as never before by multi-instrumentalist/producer Jamie MacLean. Interesting, as always, that the lyrical content of the songs is a good deal more sombre than the whimsy Dougie's trademark upbeat live, singalong performances tend to project.

"Yes, it is quite dark in places. All my albums reflect a certain time, and there is some awful dark stuff that's happening just now. Look at the future 20-year-olds are facing, which is quite serious. One of the great things about doing things on my own over all these years is having the freedom to be as thoughtful as I want with the albums without a company bothering me about the charts. And then, at the same time, I'm able to keep the gigs fun."

A piece with a real life story to match on the CD is *The Gift*, ("it's a gift from those who care, it'll take you anywhere") inspired by a visit to a Nordoff Robbins facility, the venerable, ground-breaking U.K. charity centred on music therapy.

"I played for a girl at a hospice, so gaunt and (hooked up) with tubes and watched her face change from impassive to delighted. It reminded me that music can be a magical, transforming thing."

The family-operated Perthshire Amber Festival (Oct. 28-Nov. 6), which began six years ago as a modest weekend event,

has grown to a 10-day major production centred in the ancient town of Dunkeld but stretching throughout the shire from castles to concert halls.

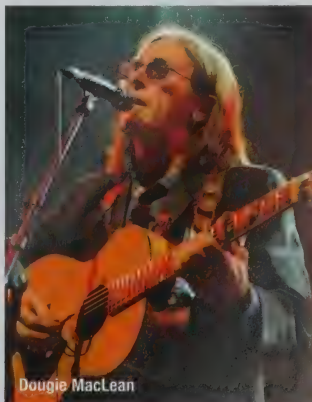
"It's amazing, people are now planning holidays around it. I've played hundreds of festivals over 30 years and honestly think we've come up with something unique, historical, truly a part of the culture, the real thing."

Its success, along with family expansion in the electronic arts—websites to video/film production—are meant to keep the working musician closer to home—and closer to the family's holiday seaside stone house on the Isle of Lewis.

"You have to learn to adapt to survive and the Internet has changed everything. The best thing I ever did was to tell the record company to (stuff it) and go my own way. Now I'm trying to stop touring so much—no more than three or four weeks at a time—because it leaves me tired, frazzled."

As to challenges large and small as yet unfulfilled, the skilled guitarist-fiddler has taken up the piano of late and looks forward to a concert debut soon. It's already changing the way he writes songs, he reports. An album of traditional songs presented in contemporary fashion is in the works. On the big picture, "I think there is a sea change there as well, that young people are not willing to accept the old baggage, the old left/right politics."

Retirement is decidedly not in the cards. "I'm engaged now more than ever. There's so much to do, and who knows where it will lead? It's a privilege."



Tubthumping



Blues from the Rock

Veteran Newfoundland musicians Peter Narvaez, Sandy Morris and Glen Collins call themselves The Superpickers—no idle boast. Jean Hewison traces the roots of this remarkable combo.

The musical heritage of the British Isles has had several hundred years to settle in Newfoundland. Lilted accordion tunes, sprightly traditional ditties and mournful ballads about lovers lost in the briny deep are mostly what people associate with the words “Newfoundland traditional music”.

But the music of The Superpickers, a stellar blues trio from St. John's, reminds us that our traditions are not entrenched, rigid creatures. They are dynamic, animated entities that continually embrace those who move to the island, bringing their cultures and customs with them.

Although the blues has only been part of the Newfoundland musical landscape for 40 or 50 years, it fits in here, as the locals would say, “like a dirty sock”. Both primal and playful, it chronicles hardships, loss, resilience and mirth, all familiar themes to people from the Rock.

Few bands express that diversity of emotion better than The Superpickers, a trio of

venerable and exceptional guitarist/musicians with scary-good chops and CVs that read like a *Who's Who* of the music biz.

The Superpickers are Peter Narvaez, Sandy Morris and Glen Collins, and their first CD together, *Blues On The Ceiling*, shows three musicians at the peak of their powers.

Narvaez, the musical heart of the band, was born in Brooklyn, NY. His mom was a Puerto Rican cabaret singer and his father was her manager and a Mexican guitarist. In university he started playing with a rock group called The Jesters, and in 1958, as part of the band Pete and Jimmy and the Rhythm Knights, he made a rockabilly album that was played by Alan Freed—and which has been pirated several times on rare rockabilly anthologies. In the '60s he also frequented the coffee houses of Greenwich Village and cultivated a growing interest in finger-style blues. Narvaez met and played with many of the great acoustic blues players of the last century, including Bukka White, Fred McDowell, Sleepy John Estes and Dave van Ronk.

Narvaez received a masters in folklore from Indiana University in 1967. He continued to perform, but in the early 1970s, while playing full time with well-known jazz musician Mel Deal, he tired of the road and applied for a position as a professor at the department of folklore at Memorial University. He got the job, and in 1974 Narvaez moved to St. John's.

A couple of weeks later, he walked into

a bar downtown. “There was nobody there except for this young kid singing in the corner to an empty room. I thought he was good, and suddenly I heard one of my songs, which I had recorded for an obscure Californian label. Then he sang another song of mine called *Maine*. I couldn't believe it! I walked up to meet him and said, ‘Hey man, you sang a couple of my songs’. The kid's name was Ron Hynes and he had bought my album at Fred's Records. Through Ron I was introduced to Sandy Morris.”

Sandy Morris is often jokingly referred to by his friends as “the easternmost guitarist in North America.” Morris is a composer, producer, music engineer, and a founding member of the legendary Wonderful Grand Band. He is renowned for his ability to create artful and sensitive accompaniments for any voice, and he has worked with many of Newfoundland's top singers, including Ron Hynes, Jenny Gear and Anita Best. His reputation has also caused him to be sought out by acts visiting the province, landing him gigs with Dame Vera Lynn, Larry Corryell and Big Momma Thornton. His tasteful licks are the perfect accompaniment for Narvaez's full-tilt guitar picking.

Glen Collins, the third and youngest member of the group, comes from a musical family. The son of Newfoundland accordion hero Vince Collins, Glen can play driving rhythm guitar behind traditional tunes, blistering electric guitar leads and spit-clean flat-picked acoustic solos. He has a degree in jazz from St. Francis Xavier, and for a number of years he toured extensively as Damhnait Doyle's guitarist. Collins also recorded, edited and mixed The Superpickers' CD.

While each of them have recorded CDs as solo artists, members of other bands, and as sidemen, *Blues On The Ceiling* is their first CD together. With three such sublimely talented guitar players, it must be sheer heaven to sit down and jam. Or is it tricky to stay out of one another's way and decide who does what?

“We start with Peter and we play around him,” says Morris. “We don't play anything that steps on what he's doing.”

“It's an organic thing,” says Collins. “After playing with Peter over the years, certain truths became apparent about how we relate to him and his style. Both myself and Sandy take what we know to be true about our own

playing and we tweak it a bit...we figure out when to lay out and when to step in. The real challenge, because all of us are prolific and we laid down a bajillion tracks, was we had to take all this information and negotiate our way through the selection of musical ideas to make them coherent. Some of them were complete and some were amalgamations, but we wanted to preserve the essence of what happens when we play together."

And in this they succeed. The CD is smooth and well-produced, but maintains the intimacy and chemistry that is apparent when the band is on stage. There is a nice blend between the covers of blues standards (including a driving, original take on *Folsom Prison Blues*) and original numbers. About half the songs on the album were penned by Narvaez and cover a range of emotions from the anxiety of being diagnosed with cancer in *The Radiation Blues and the Chemo Drag*, to the wistful and melancholic *I'll See You Again*.

"I really enjoy playing live," says Narvaez, "And I need to get out and perform just for my own personal well being, but I am happy to have this recording of the band. One of the things I've learned from seeing my old recordings on YouTube is that records are like messages in a bottle. It's great that we gig and play live, but this recording is our message in a bottle. It's something permanent, like a book. We send it out there and it takes on a life of its own."

With *Blues On The Ceiling*, The Super-pickers have cast their message out onto the waters and are happy to ride the waves and let the tide take them where it will.

Shout Factory

Fish & Bird's latest disc *Every Whisper is a Shout Across the Void* clearly raises the artistic stakes for the Vancouver quintet. Tim Readman caught up with them on the road considering the possibilities of sleeping in the belly of a horse.

The first *Penguin Eggs* interview with Fish & Bird was back when they were a duo that had just released the acclaimed

Left *Brain Blues* CD. Now they are a full-fledged five-piece band with Ryan Boer



on guitars, Zoe Guigueno on bass and Ben Kelly on drums. Principal songwriter/frontman Taylor Ashton and the much-hyphenated multi-instrumentalist/engineer-producer Adam Iredale-Gray are still at the helm, as they venture across the wilds of Canada to promote their latest release, *Every Whisper is a Shout Across the Void*. I caught up with Ashton by phone during a rare day off for a progress report.

"Well, there's five of us now—and that's how it's looking for the foreseeable future. We like the way it's going so we're sticking with it. We started to realize that the material we recorded needs more than two parts live, so it came out of necessity. It all happened very naturally. They're all people we'd played with before—friends we have known for years. It's good to have a permanent lineup to work with...it means if I am writing a song I can think of the parts in my head. I can imagine what it is going to sound like because I know everyone's playing so well."

The band is taking time during any breaks they get to write and develop new songs together. Ashton is happy that a more collaborative approach to songwriting is emerging.

"It is especially nice because we are spending so much of our lives going

through the slog of late nights and early mornings. I don't feel like I am dragging around a bunch of friends so they can play my songs—I feel like they are our songs... they are becoming more band focused."

For now, though, Ashton remains the band's main lyricist. His words paint pictures of Canada: of personal relationships, of tiny little moments that take on increasing significance over time. They go well beyond the standard rhyme schemes employed by more conventional, less adventurous writers.

"Writing lyrics is something I am doing all the time. I have usually got a half-finished song in my head I am trying to work out. I get tired of a-b-a-b rhyme schemes... so I'm trying to make sure I am not just writing lyrics to fit a groove. The words are more important than the rhyme—if the rhyme scheme changes or is irregular, why not? It was a revelatory moment when I realized the only rules I had to adhere to were my own. As for lyrical themes, I wasn't aware of any until we put the songs in order for the album. Then I realized there is a strong theme of dreams. I was thinking about how, when we are all communicating with each other, so much of what we say is misinterpreted...and how scary and alienating that can be. We are all living our own



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Tubthumping

dreams. And there's also a winter theme, I did write a lot of the tunes in winter."

Musically speaking, each of the five band members has a distinctive personal style to contribute. "Adam has the strongest trad-folk music background...Ryan and Ben played in a really loud rock cover band...Zoe has a strong jazz background and brings that influence...we all have different kinds of music that interests us. When I am listening to it I can totally hear each person's musical history in every note. It's kind of like a curry—you eat it one day and then it's even better the next day, when it's had the chance for all the flavours to meld in."

Food metaphors aside, describing Fish & Bird's music is challenging, with cumbersome labels like Indie Prog-Folk Art Rock pouring forth from the pens of reviewers and critics. Ashton remains circumspect about the issue of labelling their music.

"You could string together a whole number of endless genre qualifiers but really at the end of the day it's just put the CD on and see what you think!"

It seems people are thinking it is very good indeed. A collaborative evening with Fish & Bird and Spirit of the West's John Mann was recorded live and is available on CBC Radio's *Canada Live* podcast, and will soon be shown on CBC's All Access television. Another highlight coming up this summer is an appearance at the Dawson City Music Festival.

"Adam and I played in the Yukon and went curling with the A.D. My advice for any up-and-coming bands is do a bit of curling with the people you want gigs from!"

The talk drifts back to the present. This is the band's first major tour, and times can get pretty tough. The rigours of travelling in this huge country are felt by all.

"It is really stressful sometimes with 14-hour drives, gigging almost every night, et cetera. Zoe was reading everyone this passage from *The Last Crossing* by Guy Vanderhaeghe, where the character rides his horse in a blizzard and his horse dies, so he cuts open the horse's belly and crawls inside to stay warm.

"We were stuck for two days in Sault Ste. Marie. When we finally got the van running we had a 36-hour drive to be at a gig in Saskatoon. Eighty kilometres east of Kenora at 4 a.m. we blew a flat and the jack was the wrong size. We had no cell reception, in the middle of nowhere, with no contact and our means of transport broke. It felt almost as gruesome as your horse dying."

That story found its way into a song, as a listen to *Circle Tune* from the new CD will reveal. As we wind things up, Taylor Ashton reflects on the positive effects life on the road is having on the band's development.

"We are all going through it together. We are all committed...the more we play together the more natural it feels and the tighter we get."

I wonder aloud what's next on the Fish & Bird agenda once this marathon road trip is over. "As time goes on we'll explore more lyrical ideas and musical styles. The farther along we go, the less I could say we'd never have that in our music...so, you know, world domination...and continuing to try to make the best music we can."

So Damn Happy

Loudon Wainwright III specializes in highly personal, bittersweet lyrics that often divulge his delightfully jaundiced view of the world. He sits down with Harold Heft to explore the morbidity and looming mortality of aging.

Loudon Wainwright III has a lot to be happy about these days. Over the past couple of years, he won his first Grammy, awarded in the category of Best Traditional Folk Album, for his double CD *High Wide & Handsome: The Charlie Poole Project*; he released the first box set of his career, *40 Odd Years*; and he famously welcomed his first two grandchildren, Archangelo, son of Martha, and Viva Katherine, daughter of Rufus.

But he chuckles and confesses that the best thing about arriving in his 60s is "being a senior when I go to the movies...I love that \$2 discount!"

All jokes aside, Wainwright is experiencing an artistic renaissance of sorts. Best known as the patriarch of folk music's most self-reflective singing family, Wainwright seems to have made a creative leap forward in recent years by abandoning songwriting about himself, both on *High Wide & Handsome* and on his most recent studio album, *10 Songs for the New Depression*.

Wainwright admits that it was beneficial on *High Wide & Handsome* to jar himself out of personal songwriting and write about Charlie Poole, a hard-living bluegrass pioneer who rose to prominence in the 1920s and died in 1931 at the age of 39. He says that "it was great to get out of the Loudon Wainwright III business and focus on somebody else's world."

He quickly adds, though, that only four letters separate biography and autobiography, and he recognizes similarities between Poole and himself: "My mother's parents were from the deep, rural, poor south. And his song material—novelty songs and drinking songs and family songs and emotional mother songs—there was a lot of identification going on." Wainwright also laments that, like Poole, he spends much of his time on the road, and that both he and Poole each had just one radio hit.



Loudon Wainwright III

When he accepted his Grammy for *High Wide & Handsome*, Wainwright thanked his ex-wife, Canadian folk legend Kate McGarrigle who died in January 2010, for teaching him to frail the banjo, which is a significant point of connection between him and Poole. "She was a great, great musician," he says of McGarrigle, "what I would call a natural musician. She could pick up any instrument, whether it was a banjo or guitar or piano, and she could play the fiddle.

"This was before Anna and she teamed up," he continues. "When I first met Kate she was travelling with another wonderful Canadian musician, a woman called Roma Baran, and everybody was blown away by Kate, including me. In addition to teaching me how to frail the banjo and introducing me to music that she'd heard and I hadn't heard, we were a couple and we had a marriage which was a fierce, passionate thing...we were young and crazy and it was exciting and sexy and I'm sorry that she had to die so soon. She was something else."

One area where McGarrigle and Wainwright's work converge is in political songwriting. On his recent album, *10 Songs for the New Depression*, Wainwright continues this tradition. The opening song,

Times is Hard, catalogues a long stream of hardships: "You're losin' your job, your house and your car. / Hittin' rock bottom don't feel that far."

As he lists economic woes in *Times is Hard*, Wainwright concludes each stanza with the lament: "All I can do is play this song." This line, which sees the artist stand alone and powerless to affect change, seems to run against the belief in the folk movement that the song can change the world. "The cynic in me or the skeptic in me wonders about that or even doesn't quite buy it," he says. "Songs can lift people and help people through stuff and it's a powerful thing. But look at the world. Has it changed? It's just as weird as ever. What can change people or the world? I don't know."

Despite his recent successes "getting out of the Loudon Wainwright business," his trademark remains his sometimes humorous, sometimes devastating lyrics about his own experiences. On his 2011 tour, he introduced a number of new songs exploring the morbidity and looming mortality of aging, which seems to be his latest obsession. On one of the more memorable new songs, *My Meds*, Wainwright lists the pharmaceuticals that keep him going, and recounts the doctor's advice: "You'll need something

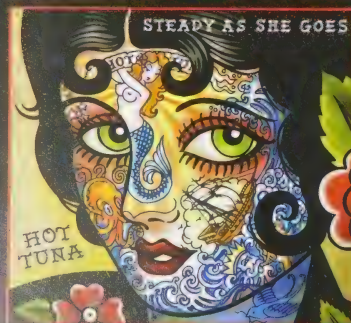
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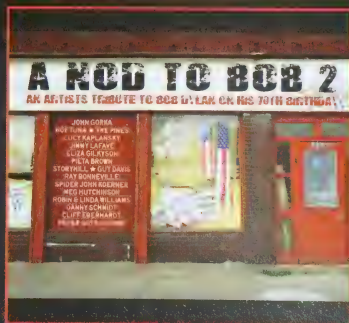
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For Wainwright, life is full of absurd, intense and sometimes tragic interpersonal complexities, and his songs remain the medium in which he can search for universal answers through the lens of his own story.

On stage, Wainwright is a study in contrasts. After a show this past April at Hugh's Room in Toronto, Wainwright said that he loves performing but is worn down by life on the road. While performing, he is lively and charming—a true professional trotting out old favourites, new material and well-worn gags—but at the same time he checks his watch regularly as if he's only putting in the requisite time before he can move on to the next stop. After the show he's swarmed by fans young and old like a true star, but he's uncomfortable with the role, skittishly signing a few autographs before retreating upstairs to a warm dinner in a tiny green room.

For the last 40 years, Wainwright has earned his living as a performer and has spoken through his songs. He supplements his income with acting roles, and seems to turn up often on screen as a minister. Wainwright speculates on the association of himself with God: "I've also been a doctor several times in the movies," he says. "I guess doctors think of themselves as being God, too."

Then he recalls that his mother, a South Georgia Baptist, wanted him to be a preacher. "She always thought that I had an evangelical streak. If you think about it, people who stand up and jump up and down in front of people for a living...they are a kind of preacher in a sense."



Wainwright III



David Francey

Frontline Folk

A self-confessed newshound, David Francey takes today's headlines and turns them into songs. Late Edition, his fine new disc, features writing as astute and economical as a good reporter's, reckons Patrick Langston.

Heidi Collins, formerly with CNN and now a Fox Network employee, should not be anchoring newscasts, according to David Francey. "Anyone as beautiful as that is just distracting. The gravitas of the news is lost when they're presenting it. I want my news from a bald guy with glasses who looks worried."

Francey, as fans of the Scottish-born, Eastern Ontario-dwelling singer/songwriter know, is a serious devotee of the news.

Paper Boy, from 2001's Juno-winning *Far End of Summer*, is about his first job delivering papers as a lad in Ayrshire, Scotland. *Things They Do* from the same album was inspired by a newspaper story, as was *New Jerusalem* from *Right of Pas-*

sage. The latter album netted him his third Juno in 2007, the same year he won Best Singer—Contemporary at the Canadian Folk Music Awards.

Speaking by telephone from Bishop, CA, home of the thrice-weekly *Inyo Register*, Francey says CBC Radio, BBC World News and pretty much any newspaper are attention magnets for him. On the road, he looks for local papers. "I like to see what's on people's minds, what's bugging them. When I'm on the road down here, I peel back right away to the sports sections to see if anyone is covering hockey."

Francey's fine new album—is the guy capable of making a bad one?—spotlights the news. *Late Edition* (Laker Music) features a cover photo of a barber shop window and door. Inside, someone's reading a newspaper and a blank television screen is visible in one corner. The liner notes feature Francey perusing an unidentified newspaper, a column called *Around Town* just visible on the page he's reading.

The album's lead track, *Yesterday's News*, is about how Francey feeds dated newspapers to his wood stove, a tasty metaphor for the transience, in a pell-mell world, of even the

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most distressing headlines. The song's meditative subject matter contrasts sharply with the jaunty melody and arrangement featuring Fats Kaplan on fiddle and Kieran Kane on octave mandolin and backing vocals.

Newspapers and television news also make an appearance in *I Live in Fear*, which pays homage to Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa. Like two others on the album, Francey co-wrote the song with Kane.

Pretty Jackals, meanwhile, pillories the glamour given to the news by the Heidi Collinses of the world. "The pretty jackals smell the blood / Revel in the fire and flood," sings Francey, his tone at once biting and despairing that our appetite for titillation can ever be satisfied.

"I came off a very long tour ... and I turned on CNN. It was Soledad O'Brien or one of them, and I got all pissed off about the whole thing and wrote that one."

The news is a barometer of our times but it's not Francey's sole interest on his ninth album (he debuted with *Torn Screen Door* in 1999).

There are, as always, love songs. *When I'm Not Thinking About You*, which he co-wrote with Kane, finds the narrator filling his days with inconsequential tasks—hanging paintings on the walls, reading the paper front to back—after his love life goes south. "Look at all the things that I can do / When I'm not thinking about you," he boasts, the song's plot, irony and parts of its melody echoing the Statler Brothers' 1965 country hit *Flowers on the Wall*.

"We were writing in Kieran's cabin in upstate New York. That one was super-late at night. After we finished, I said, 'Jesus Christ, I think we just rewrote the Statler Brothers!' We laughed our heads off, but I thought, 'Oh well, no point changing it now.' It's been plaguing me ever since."

As he's done on past albums, Francey also revisits a couple of older love songs. *Long Brown Hair* and *Just the Same* were both written in the early 1990s when he was working as a carpenter in Quebec's Eastern Townships.

"They'd never been recorded and I've always liked them. We were (recording) everything live off the floor, and I

thought of *Long Brown Hair*. I looked around and said, 'How about this one?' Everyone just jumped all over it. If a song's good, it lasts and hopefully it's as pertinent today as the day you wrote it."

In keeping with Francey's usual writing style, there's no filler in *Long Brown Hair* or any other tune on the new album. As astute and economical as a good reporter, he goes in, tells the story and gets out. Sentences tend to be simple and declarative, adjectives are dispensed sparingly, style is often telegraphic. Melody, meanwhile, is so integral to Francey's writing that it's often hard to tell where it ends and lyrics start.

His songs, haunted but not ruled by emotion, frequently suggest that longing is the essence of the human condition.

Blue Heart of Texas exemplifies all of the above. A snapshot of the lonely side of touring, its quiet, steady rhythm feels as inevitable as the narrator's empty mail box and the ceaseless rain outside his hotel.

At the same time, says Francey, there's a wonderful sense of relief in hitting the road. Because he started in the music business relatively late—57 this year, he was already in his late 40s when he made the jump into full-time music—he says that he's never been distracted by the temptations of the road that might ensnare a younger person. Besides, he knows about travelling, having done a good chunk of it when he was younger.

"We crossed the Sierra Nevada yesterday, and it took me back to when I was 16 and hitchhiking across the country. On the road, I'm working, and it makes me feel great. I'm interested in what I see and I like people."

He also stays in close touch with his wife, Beth Girdler, for whom he wrote the album's heartfelt closer *Grateful*, and with other members of his family.

Being a late bloomer, he says, means he also feels a little removed from the music industry with which so many of his contemporaries have been involved for decades.

"I never paid too much attention to the business side. My part is just to write songs and play well, and the rest will happen or it won't. I have no ambition to be a folk magnate."

Strings 'n' Things

Kevin Breit and Harry Manx, two of the most accomplished acoustic musicians in Canada, consider themselves an orchestra of two. Their new disc, *Strictly Whatever*, certainly adds credence to their case. **Pen poised:** Mike Sadava.

Call their relationship a long-distance musical romance. Or friends with fringe benefits—a great disc every few years.

There's no doubt that Harry Manx and Kevin Breit get along. They bring out the best in each other when they get together, both musically and personally.

I feel like an interloper during a conference call with them—Manx is in northern British Columbia on his way to the big smoke of Alberta, and Breit is back home in Elora, ON, after a month of touring Europe. They spend much of the hour catching up. Manx talks about the thrill of touring with David Lindley: "You would have fit in perfectly, Kevin," Manx tells Breit, who is desperate to hear a recording from that tour.

Breit talks about his European tour as part of Hugh Laurie's band. Yes, that Hugh Laurie, the comic actor from *House* and *Black Adder*, who turns out to be no Billy Bob Thornton but an accomplished New Orleans-style pianist who spent many years studying the music of Professor Longhair and others. Manx asks him if he got a walk-on part on *House*. "Yeah, I play a character who's all messed up and a musician," he jokes.

And they talk about their kids (Breit has three, Manx has one) and Breit's song, *Little Ukulele* is popular in both households.

Breit and Manx now have a new baby: their third disc, *Strictly Whatever*. They're both proud papas of the product of three days in the studio with percussionist Art Avalos in December, a disc with tons of groove along with quirky side trips and more than a touch of humour.

Manx calls it their most accessible disc yet. There's less Mohan veena (that 20-stringed Indian instrument Manx spent five years studying in India and introduced to North America), but Manx holds down the



bottom end with a lot of baritone guitar. Between them they play 10 instruments on the disc, with a minimum of overdubbing. And any recording that starts with the Bobby Hebb classic *Sunny* has to be accessible.

They'll play a couple of festivals together this summer, but no big tours are in the works. That's too bad because they'd like to see more of each other.

"I'm always sad when Harry and I are playing because I know that such things don't last," Breit says. "We both have different trails we have to go on."

Breit's skills on guitar, banjo, mandolin and just about every other stringed instrument are high in demand. He has recorded and toured with a long list of musical luminaries, from Norah Jones to k.d. lang to Roseanne Cash. He also belongs to several Toronto bands, including the Sisters Euclid. Manx, for all his instrumental wizardry, is in demand as one of Canada's most prolific and recognizable singer/songwriters.

The two originally met 10 years ago at the Summerfolk festival in Owen Sound, ON. They were to play a Sunday morning workshop together, and Breit remembers asking the soundman whether he was Harry Manx. Somebody recorded the workshop, and a cassette tape started circulating around. People started asking them about

it, and a year or two later, they were in a Toronto recording studio together, which happened to be the next time they met.

They were supposed to be recording with California musician Greg Liesz but he got sick and couldn't make it. They persevered, and after four days, with no previous rehearsal, they came up with their first disc together, the bluesy *Jubilee*.

They're not big on rehearsing before they record, although they spent a day or two together before *Strictly Whatever*. "It's nice to go in intuitively and see what comes out of it," Manx says.

They both try to avoid preconceived notions about what their songs should sound like before the other player gets involved. There's no point as the magic comes from the "sweet surrender" of putting a song into the hands of the other, letting him make major decisions on the sound, groove and even instrumentation of the tune. Sometimes one has a germ of a tune, such as an instrumental part, and the other will mould it into an entire song, sometimes with the help of a friend called Jack Daniel's.

Manx says a lot of compromise goes into their partnership. "You have to be flexible in this situation, you have to give and take. You have to be working with the other person to get a neutral evaluation of the music...I'm not married to anything. I

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"There couldn't be a better experience for someone like me to be sitting there like a fly on the wall, witnessing that constant inspiration, constant improvisation by two masters."
— Holger Petersen

can let go of anything that's for the greater good."

They call themselves an "orchestra of two," and although they'll never sound exactly as they did on the recording, they avoid the level of overdubs that would make it impossible to be in the same musical ballpark when they play live.

One thing they don't mind doing is bending the rules. Take *Hippy Trippy* on the last disc, a Breit instrumental where electric sitar meets surf music. Or *In Good We Trust*, the title track of their 2007 disc, where eastern European mandolin orchestra in crazy time signatures plays over a straight "I-woke-up-this-morning Delta slow blues riff. (Manx could only keep playing the riff by not listening to Breit.)

"We go to places we shouldn't go," Breit says. "But I don't think we're breaking any laws. Nobody gets hurt."

Holger Petersen, whose company, Stony Plain Records, bankrolled the last two recordings, was present for most of the sessions and was blown away by the creativity he witnessed. He was impressed by the quality of their songs, their ability to pick covers and how they could build them up with their vast array of instruments. He wasn't surprised by Manx's distinctive, warm voice but he didn't expect to be so impressed by the vocals of Breit, who isn't known as a singer.

"There couldn't be a better experience for someone like me to be sitting there like a fly on the wall, witnessing that constant inspiration, constant improvisation by two masters," Petersen says. "I hope we do many more projects."

They're already thinking of doing another disc, even though they have barely released the latest one. Manx has history of wordplay in his album titles, starting with *Dog My Cat, West Eats Meat* and so on.

One suggestion that Breit liked came from a Brazilian musician he toured with—*Two Old Whores*. "I thought it was a great title until I mentioned it to my wife. She became quiet, so quiet I could hear a cricket."



Vintage Virtuoso

Mandolin maestro John Reischman's new disc, *Vintage & Unique*, takes bluegrass brilliantly beyond its traditional boundaries. Mike Sadava pays homage to the man.

There are many things one can say about John Reischman's mandolin playing. Yes, it's fluid, strong and melodic. Yes, it's provided many memorable instrumental tunes. But it's the tone that people most often mention. His ability to coax deep woody sounds out of such a small, thin instrument is legendary among mandolin players. Sure, there are flashier players like Sam Bush, players who are more out there like Andy Statman. But none of them match Reischman's tonal quality.

Part of it is the 1924 Gibson Lloyd Loar that has been his constant companion for the past 30 years. But, "like David Grisman says: 'It's not the car, it's the driver,'" Reischman says while waiting to cross the border on his way to Bellingham, WA, from his Vancouver home.

Reischman says people have told him he had good tone since he was a teenager in northern California and was just getting enough chops to play in public.

"To me the key to achieving good tone is hearing what you think is good tone," he says. "When I started out, I wasn't conscious of it. I just played what sounded good to me, and that was a deep sound with no pick noise."

When he started getting serious, he paid more attention to the mechanics of his playing: hitting the strings a certain weight with his right hand and fretting cleanly with his left hand, letting the notes ring.

The completely self-taught Reischman first picked up the guitar as a teenager, and started playing mandolin when he borrowed a department store model. He got a slightly better one (a Harmony A model) for his 16th birthday. Living in a small town with no mandolin players, he tuned it to an open E, but eventually was exposed to bluegrass players like John Hartford, Norman Blake and Vasser Clements and started learning to play properly.

The big turning point came after buying a Newgrass Revival disc in the '70s. As he explains it, his local hero had been

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Tubthumping

Robben Ford, who grew up in the same small town of Ukiah and was on his way to becoming a top blues guitarist. The Newgrass Revival's Sam Bush was playing with the same level of verve on the mandolin that Ford brought to the guitar.

"I put it on and I'd never heard any mandolin playing like it.... Sam Bush's playing was so strong rhythmically, clean, exciting. I tried to learn as many of his solos as I could."

He has always been one to pay attention to detail, even with the basics. I remember seeing him in a workshop at Wintergrass with mando monsters Chris Thile and Mike Marshall. When somebody asked what are they working on, Thile said Bach, Marshall said Brazilian music and Reischman said his chop, the percussive chording that serves as the snare drum for bluegrass music but which many players take for granted.

All that attention to the small stuff has resulted in an impressive resumé for Reischman. When he was in his 20s legendary acoustic guitarist Tony Rice recruited him and he appeared on two albums of the Tony Rice Unit, and with the Good Ol' Persons, a progressive California bluegrass band with the likes of Laurie Lewis and Kathy Kallick. Despite a successful musical career in California, he moved to Canada to be with his sweetheart and now wife, Gwendolyn, and he's lived in Vancouver for 20 years.

These days he's a busy man. The Jaybirds have just released their fifth album and he's headed to Bellingham to rehearse with guitar virtuoso John Miller for their third album together. And he's booking studio time and assembling musicians for a third solo instrumental album. He is also in demand as a studio musician, contributing mandolin tracks for the likes of Harry Manx, Jim Byrnes, Valdy, Roy Forbes, Raffi, and the great songwriter Susan Crowe, with whom he has had a longtime collaboration.

By no means is Reischman strictly bluegrass. The music he does with Miller has a Latin jazzy feel; he plays around Vancouver with the Brazilian Southern Cross Band; and has even worked with Red Chamber, a traditional Chinese string band.

But he has never lost his love for

bluegrass. He still raves about the talent of Bill Monroe and even did a travelling tribute show in the '90s to him.

The Jaybirds have been a mainstay for Reischman for 11 years. Although it's a collective effort, with all five of the band members contributing tunes to the latest disc, *Vintage & Unique*, Reischman's vision is all over the Jaybirds. "When I started the band I was getting interested in old-time music, especially through Scott Nygard and Dirk Powell..." he says. "The repertoire was to be bluegrass and old-time, and that wasn't too common in the bluegrass world."

But there are still modern elements that approach new acoustic music, and lyrical content that goes where many bluegrass bands fear to tread, such as Reischman's co-write with Trisha Gagnon on *Gold Mountain*, a song about the plight of Chinese railway workers. Like Reischman, the Jaybirds are all unassuming, laid-back people, relying more on taste than flash, although they can kick when they need to. There's a band chemistry that would be hard to find elsewhere.

Reischman's association with John Miller is even longer, and their duo instrumental pieces are much jazzier, complex compositions. Reischman raves about Miller as a "super-creative, prolific composer. The issue is not what we record, but what we don't record. When I'm around him I feel like George Harrison with Lennon and McCartney."

Many of Reischman's fans eagerly anticipate his next solo instrumental album, which would be his first since the acclaimed *Up In the Woods* in 1999, and he is looking forward to it just as much. He's pretty happy that old-time fiddler extraordinaire Bruce Molsky is willing to participate, but the album won't happen overnight.

"I don't have a deadline. I'll record a bit here and there. It'll be old-time, bluegrass and maybe a little contemporary music."

He still has a few things on his musical bucket list that he'd like to do, such as an album of swing jazz. Near the top is recording again with Tony Rice and bassist Todd Phillips. "Those albums were recorded 30 years ago. I did a pretty good job, but I don't think I was as developed as a musician."

Tender, Merci

Flautist and fiddler Stephanie Gagnon's gorgeously sedate singing on *L'hirondelle* has Yves Bernard searching for superlatives. Made with Paul Marchand and Martin Racine, it draws largely from the softly sung songs of the Breton tradition.

Her name has been on the lips of many for more than a year now: Stephanie Gagnon interprets traditional tunes in her own way, with a freshness to her voice that has brought on comparisons to certain young pop singers.

She delivers her repertoire softly, with a lot of soul and sensitivity. While the trio used to bear solely her name, the release of *L'hirondelle* has brought the names of Paul Marchand and Martin Racine into the forefront, and they have become like two trailblazing big brothers. The result is a superb, multicoloured folk adventure.

"It's true that it can be confusing, because I'm the one who chooses the songs, while the rest of the work is done by all three of us," Stephanie explains. While she has been playing music since she was five years old, she only starting getting into traditional music later on.

"It was thanks to some friends that I met at university in Quebec when I was 18 or 19. Together, we formed Gross Gnômes, a traditional party music group. I mostly played the flute and it was mostly the guys who sang, like in a real trad band," she laughs.

The group lasted for a few years in the early 2000s. Their name made reference to the fact that its members were all studying in agronomics. In the beginning, Gros-Gnômes played well-known tunes, and then the six musicians began making their own arrangements. Soon after, Stephanie took to travelling, and then she returned to Alma, in the Lac Saint Jean region where she was born. She moved onto her father's farm, began farming and formed, in 2004, the group l'Atisée, with fiddler Sophie Lavoie and guitarist Pierre-Antoine Gauthier.

"That group sounded more like what I am doing now with Paul Marchand and Martin Racine," the singing flutist and fiddler tells us. "We sing more laid back numbers.



That's in my nature. I'm a pretty smooth, relaxed and calm person. It shows in my choice of songs. I don't look for call and response songs, and I'm really attracted to the Breton repertoire because they have so many nice, soft tunes."

It is no coincidence, then, that the album's title track, *L'hirondelle*, comes from Upper Brittany, and that the trio also fuses two versions of the classic *Les Marches de la Cour du Palais*. In the latter, Stephanie performs a vocal duo with Paul using *tuilage*, a singing technique that is often used in Breton dance songs. The two take turns singing, but each one repeats the final syllables of the preceding singer.

"It's so that there is never a break in the song," Stephanie explains.

Her naturally soft voice is sometimes reminiscent of that of a little girl's, which is in stark contrast to that of Paul's. It is Paul who comes up with the basic arrangements for each song and his ideas are often very eclectic, going from folk, blues and ragtime atmospheres to songs that are more rock in their energy, despite the fact that the music remains almost entirely acoustic.

"He is very percussive on the guitar and when he plays he can make his instrument sound as though there were bass and drums

accompanying him. He's practically a one-man band," says Stephanie.

And the man has experience. Born in the Lanaudière region, he was involved with the founding of the groups Manigance and Enterloup, not to mention his collaborations with, among others, singer Tess Leblanc, Irish flutist Desi Wilkinson and American violinist Laurie Hart. Along with Martin Racine, another veteran of the scene who has been playing Quebecois and Irish music since the 1970s revival, the two form a great pair for backing up Stephanie. Martin was an important element in La Bottine Souriante, where he could be found injecting their music with his contagious swing. He sometimes plays the ukulele with Stephanie and Paul, bringing a certain spontaneous lightness to the band's sound that goes marvellously well with Stephanie's voice. He and Stephanie also like to switch it up on the violin.

Stephanie talks about their complicity: "Martin is also very rhythmic and he excels at improvisation, while I am more harmonic and melodic. He always wants me to play violin with him. I like doing that, but I also have to concentrate on my singing, so I let him do his thing and then I see how I can fit into what he is doing. Sometimes we

just simply double each other."

Stephanie is an instinctive person. It shows in her playing but also in the way she chooses her repertoire. "Everything is based on the lyrics. Sometimes we will slightly alter the melodies. In the past, I have worked with lyrics without knowing their melodies. I won't go and willingly search for themes, trying to make things fit into a uniform concept, but certain subjects just speak to me more than others. For example, I won't necessarily be attracted to war marches. I see songs as being like individual little movies."

If the songs she has chosen were movies, then they would be home movies starring the swallow (*L'hirondelle*), in search of its lost love; the demon, who entices young people to fool around; the beautiful girl, who manages to escape the worst in a story of awkward love; and the young woman, who refuses the love of an insistent old man, while another accepts it for economic reasons. Some of the texts are more well-known, like *Le Roi a Fait Battre Tambour*, which was inspired by Bernard Simard's version of the song. Others are more contemporary, like Laurence Lepage's *Mon Vieux François* and Brassens's *La Mauvaise Réputation*, which the trio interprets in such a Québécois manner, it would have some believing that it was written on this side of the Atlantic.

What has Stephanie retained from this experience? "When you're in a young band, you're carefree and you want to go off in all sorts of directions. With these guys, it's more instinctive; it works really well, it flows quickly and the arrangements come together easily. It's as if we were going back to the essentials."

And that's exactly what they've done!



Noteworthy

Author and playwright Colin Escott uncovered Sam Phillips's legendary Million Dollar Quartet tape and turned it into a hit musical. Richard Flohil catches up with the man who writes sleeve notes for Bob Dylan and Hank Williams albums.

"Look," says writer Colin Escott with a laugh, "this isn't *The Sound of Music*. It's just a romp, a laugh, a good time in a theatre for 90 minutes."

He's talking about *Million Dollar Quartet*, a musical he co-wrote that's currently on Broadway, in London, and has just celebrated its thousandth performance in Chicago.

Escott, an urbane but diffident man with strong Canadian links, built his musical around one of the most significant gatherings in popular music history: a jam session held at the Sun Studios in Memphis more than half a century ago.

On the afternoon of Dec. 4, 1956, Elvis Presley, back home again in his hometown, went to Sun—along with girlfriend Marilyn Evans—to watch his early mentor, Sam Phillips, record a follow-up to Carl Perkins's hit *Blue Suede Shoes*. Phillips had brought in a local pianist, Jerry Lee Lewis, to spark up the rhythm section.

After listening to a playback of *Matchbox Blues*, Elvis joined the musicians in the studio, and at some point Johnny Cash wandered in and a highly informal jam session developed. Jack Clement, who was engineering the session, kept the tape running, and Phillips, ever aware of a publicity opportunity, called the local

newspaper, which immediately sent around a reporter and photographer.

The tapes remained in the Sun vaults for years, waiting—it seems in hindsight—for Colin Escott to discover them. The only evidence that they even existed was a worn copy of a cassette that was passed around Nashville insiders, almost like a holy artifact.

Escott, fascinated by music as a schoolboy in England, started his career as the go-to person for record company compilations in 1971 with a collection called *Sun Rockabillys*. Two years before, Phillips had sold his label to Shelby Singleton, who was delighted to have someone release material he probably didn't even know he had acquired.

It was the beginning of a long relationship with Sun—a relationship which allowed Escott free rein to wander through the vaults, discovering not only the original tapes of hundreds of sessions but rehearsals, out-takes, in-studio conversations, auditions, and all sorts of musical disasters. Among them: some 20 minutes of that informal jam session.

Phillips had sold the Elvis catalogue to RCA Victor for \$35,000 (far too little, in hindsight, but he invested it in a start-up ho-



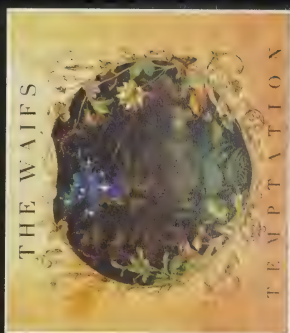
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Tubthumping

John Reischman & THE JAYBIRDS

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John Reischman & the Jaybirds have achieved the near impossible with this recording. Even while sticking with the time honored roots of bluegrass, they have boldly staked their claim on the music and made it their own. While there are a few traditional songs on the album, most tracks are written by members of the group. It's both traditional and original at the same time, not an easy thing to do. But they make it sound effortless and it doesn't get any better than that. In fact, as bluegrass albums go, it doesn't get any better than **Vintage & Unique**.

Herman Joryer, *Mandolin Magazine*

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tel chain called Holiday Inns and became a millionaire). And RCA did release some 20 minutes of that informal jam session, but it was years later that Escott found a much more interesting reel of tape—wound backwards—with the rest of the jam. That discovery revealed the most fascinating part of the session: Elvis explaining how he had heard Jackie Wilson imitating a Presley performance. The result is a bizarre moment when Elvis imitates one of the great voices of rhythm and blues imitating himself singing *Don't Be Cruel*.

Says Presley on the tape: "He tried so hard until he got much better, boy, much better than that record of mine..."

Working out of England, Escott continued to create compilations and reissues of all kinds of music—blues, rockabilly, country, gospel and pop—and he had become the world's leading expert on Sun Records.

Needing to be closer to the source of so much music—record company vaults—he decided to move to Canada in the early '80s, and initially worked with PolyGram Records' operations department in Montreal. After a few years, he moved to Toronto, where he fostered his friendships with two major collectors: Dave Booth, whose massive Showtime Archives holdings (records, photographs, books, etc.) are unmatched in North America, and the late Jack Winter, who housed some 100,000 records in his home.

With Toronto as his base, Escott continued as a freelance author, compiler and musicologist. The compilations kept coming—he has not kept count, but he's probably done more than a thousand in the years since *Sun Rockabillys*. But the need to get closer and closer to the source of American roots music led him to move to the Nashville area in 1999, where he lives now on a farm outside the city. Does he miss Canada? "Well, I wish I still had the Ontario Health Insurance Plan," he laughs.

His catalogue as an author—well over a dozen books now, including two seminal volumes on Hank Williams—continues to grow, as does his long collection of sleeve notes, box set booklets, and miscellaneous articles.

Williams continues to fascinate him, and he's worked on countless reissues of the tortured country singer's entire catalogue—including most of those precious outtakes. He's currently working on yet another Hank set, a three-CD collection

for Time-Life that will include, for the first time, the very first record the singer made, when he was 15.

He recently did the research and extensive liner notes for the re-issue of Bob Dylan's demos for the Witmark publishing company (*Bootleg Sessions Vol. 9*, which includes 47 songs recorded between 1962 and 1964, including many of his best-known songs). Oh, yes, and there's a Perry Como box set, dozens of detailed re-issues of obscure country singers for the German Bear Family label, and quick collections of less obscure material, "destined," he says, "for supermarkets in Belgium."

The success of *Million Dollar Quartet*, which he co-wrote with Floyd Mutrux, has become what he might have called, back in the U.K., "a steady earner." Consisting of some 30 songs, it's an hour and a half of pop material that every aging baby boomer—and, amazingly, many much younger people—can identify with. It's won a Tony Award and been nominated for other Tonys and three Drama League awards. It begins a national tour in Cleveland this fall, and the Mirvish theatrical dynasty is in discussions for a Canadian tour next year.

Actors—rather than musical imitators—play the roles of Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins and Sam Phillips. Escott says: "In casting Presley we didn't want a 'fat Elvis'—we wanted someone who could get into the role of a guy coming home from fame and fortune and revisiting his friendships with people he had, in fact, left behind."

Getting clearance for the songs was relatively easy, Escott says. "With the state of the music industry these days, music publishers are much more willing to be amenable and reasonable. When we started to go for image and likeness rights, we were dealing with four estates, and the management for Jerry Lee Lewis—the only one of the participants still alive—and we ran into no problems. I think they wanted this to succeed as much as we did."

Meanwhile, Escott continues to write books and sleeve notes, and create more recorded compilations. "I don't want to retire," he insists. "But this show might just enable me to work on projects that I find interesting rather than ones that pay the rent."

Classic Country

On his wonderful new disc, *Sleep Beneath The Willow*, Daniel Romano captures all the raw, authentic emotion of traditional country. The noted guitarist for City & Colour tells Jason Schneider, George Jones is his main influence.

It's a typical night at a popular Canadian rock club; the packed house is chatty, eager for the headlining act to come on. But first, a young, lean figure in a trimly cut western suit and modest Stetson leads his band on stage and calmly kicks off his set. The other musicians are equally young—with the exception of the bandleader's father, who plays rhythm guitar—and in their own distinctive matching outfits. From the first aching notes, the room is transported back to a time when country music mattered. Even audience members who possess no understanding of that time can feel it, as evidenced by their rapt attention.

The man standing stock still at the microphone and engaging the crowd with a dark, piercing glare is Daniel Romano. He's an unlikely crusader for a country music revival, given that he is best known as a founding member of Attack In Black, a band that emerged from the same early 2000s southern Ontario punk scene that also spawned Alexisonfire. Romano's connection to the latter band extends farther, to his participation in singer/guitarist Dallas Green's side project City & Colour.

But not long after the release of Attack In Black's last album in spring 2009, Romano finally embraced the music that had tugged at his heart his entire life, but never had the will to perform. The change started taking hold prior to that when AIB toured with New Brunswick alt-folkie Shotgun Jimmie. Following his example, Romano, AIB bassist Ian Kehoe, and Constantines guitarist Steve Lambke started You've Changed Records, with Jimmie's album, *Still Jimmie*, marking the label's arrival on the national scene.

On its heels came albums by Lambke's folk-rock side project, Baby Eagle, and an acoustic collaboration by Romano, Julie Doiron and Fred Squire. While You've



Daniel Romano

Changed's overall visual esthetic, which has faithfully refashioned low-budget country album covers of the early '70s, made it initially seem as if those involved were country music dilettantes taking a not-too-subtle poke at the genre, the raw emotion contained on those releases was anything but ironic.

Romano went a step farther in 2010 with his first solo album, *Workin' For The Music Man*, a classic country record in every sense that found Romano handling most of the parts, including some deft pedal steel guitar playing. Now, any questions about the validity of that album have been firmly erased with his latest effort, *Sleep Beneath The Willow*, in some respects a more accomplished collection, just as Gram Parsons's *Grievous Angel* was the more refined addendum to his solo debut, *GP*.

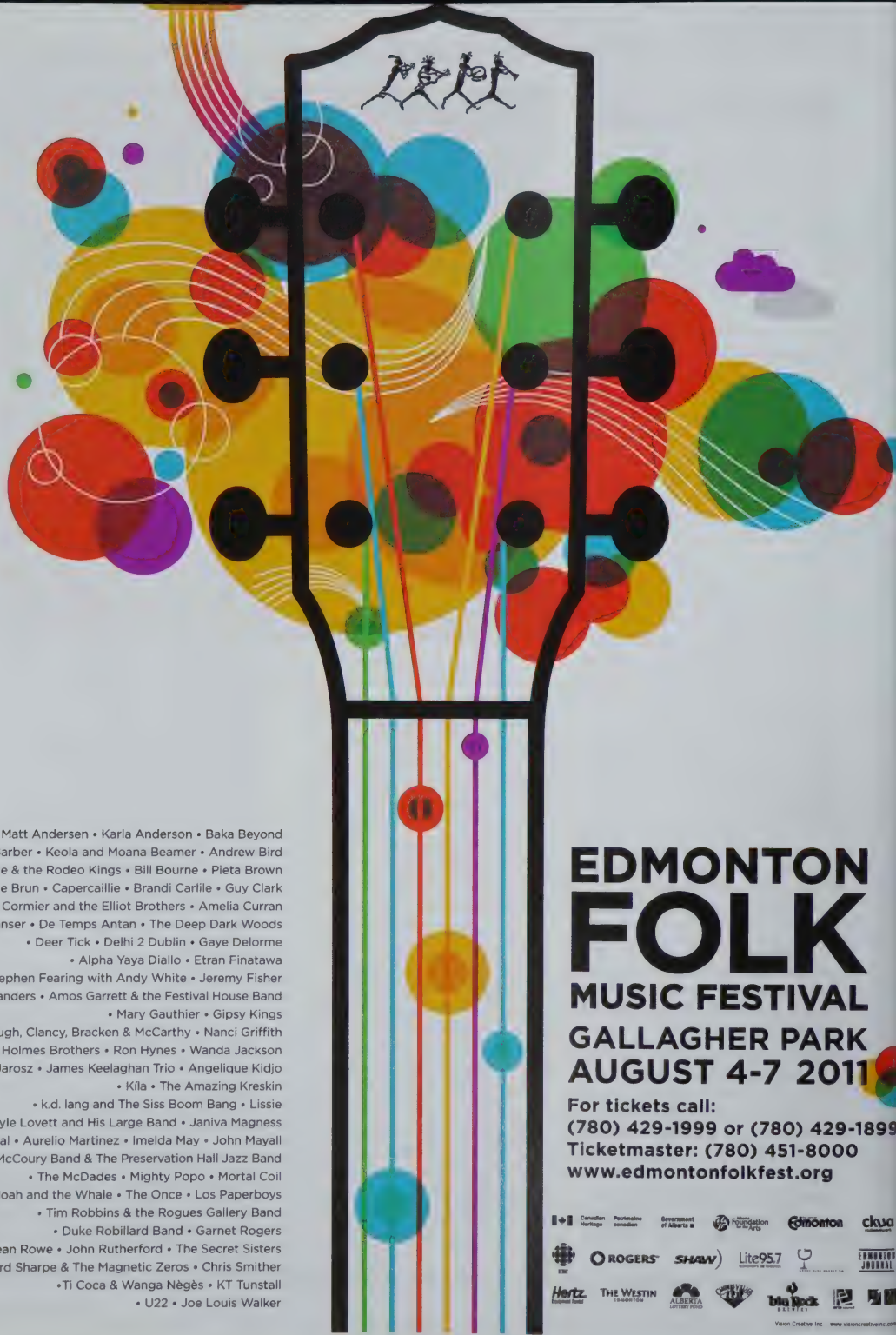
While Parsons's legacy of flamboyantly bridging country and rock was at one time the indie musician's natural key to entering the nominally conservative country music sphere, Romano is part of a new generation that seems more eager to circumvent the entire long-haired country-rock era and get directly to the source. The appeal, he

says, is not only the emotional thrust of the music but also the discipline required to sustain it.

"I just think that country is the best kind of music," Romano says. "It's sort of the polar opposite of what might be contemporary today, lyrically speaking anyway. I wanted to put forward something that was the most straightforward music I could do, as well as the most traditional."

He adds, "There is definitely less of a theme on [*Willow*] than on *Music Man*. All of the songs are heavily influenced by the production and style of classic country music, from the lyrics to the guitar tone. That's what ties these songs together most."

Authenticity appears to be crucial for Romano at this stage. In the notes for both of his albums he has gone to great lengths to list all of the vintage gear utilized at his Welland, ON, home studio. And again on *Sleep Beneath The Willow*, apart from fiddler Natalie Walker and a trio of female backing singers that includes his girlfriend, Misha Bower of the band Bruce Peninsula, Romano performed all of the parts. No mean feat when opting to use two-inch tape over the much more convenient ProTools.



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Tubthumping

Still, Romano maintains that in spite of his alt-rock pedigree, he feels most comfortable in this creative setting.

"I think I understand this music best out of everything I've ever tried to do," he says. "It's a very different thing playing solo, I've discovered. There is so much more pressure not to mess things up. The first time I played these songs live with my band, there definitely were some nerves. We all sort of decided, without really talking about it, that our approach should be to play as quietly as possible, and that really left a lot of room for dynamics to grow."

Although Romano's father, David, does not have a full-time role in this project, his musical interest and experience is in large part the driving force behind it. It was through him that Daniel says he first heard country music, going back to Hank Williams. "Hank certainly brought a lot to the table, but I think that those who followed in his footsteps have more to do with what I'm going after. George Jones is my main influence, I would say."

That sentiment would surely be echoed



by every singer shuffling around Nashville at this moment, but there is no doubting Romano's sincerity, especially after hearing the combination of fluid phrasing and pure heartbreak on standout *Willow* tracks such as *Hard On You* and *Knowing That You're Mine*.

Romano plans on continuing down this musical path as far as it will take him, even though he will be busy throughout the rest of this year touring with Dallas Green in support of the latest City & Colour album,

Little Hell. The crowds will be larger than those that come to see him play solo, but Romano says just having the opportunity to perform in any capacity is something that every musician he knows never takes for granted.

"I think that the people I am privileged to work with would be making their wonderful music whether anyone was listening or not," he says. "The same goes for me. I did it when there was no one listening, and I still treat it that way."

Win Emmylou Harris's new disc *Hard Bargain*

Emmylou Harris
HARD BARGAIN

With 21 solo albums to her credit, Emmylou Harris needs little introduction in these pages. While largely an interpreter of other writers'

songs, Harris has composed all but two of the 13 tracks on *Hard Bargain*. Incidentally, the title track comes from Toronto's Ron Sexsmith. Warner Music Canada has very kindly provided us with six copies. To win one, answer the questions below correctly and e-mail them to penguineggs@shaw.ca. Put Harris in the subject line. And please don't forget to include a mailing address and a proper contact name in order for us to forward your disc.

Answers to the Bob Dylan contest are: Q1. Charlie Patton. Q2. *Blowin' In The Wind*. Q3.

Neil Young. And the winners are: Shelley MacDonald, Edmonton, AB; Michael Luce, London, ON; Valerie McCormack, Fort Erie, ON; Stephen Lewis, Bellingham, WA; Shelley Whitehead, Turner Valley, AB; Kirk Trew, Saskatoon, SK; Laurie Cadue, Gananoque, ON; Peter Fleming, Dartmouth, NS; Pat Battles, Victoria, BC; Paul-Emile Comeau, Saulnierville, NS; J. Beaver, Appleton, WI; David Kidney, Dundas, ON; Amanda Lewis, London, ON; Paul Norton, Vancouver, BC; Mary Boudreau, Dartmouth, NS; Michael Carter, Nelson, BC.

Q 1. Which songwriter did Harris marry in 1969.

Q 2. Name the club where she initially met members of the Flying Burrito Brothers.

Q 3. Name the Canadian who produced most of Harris's early recordings.



Pleased to see the King

While The Decemberists frequently tip their trilbys to the likes of Steel-eye Span, Fairport Convention and Anne Briggs, they draw on many disparate influences as they plough their own somewhat eccentric and always unpredictable furrow. Their quite wonderful latest disc, *The King Is Dead*, features Peter Buck of R.E.M. and Gillian Welch and it briefly topped the U.S. album charts this spring. Colin Irwin has a word.

“Things are a little weird around here right now...” says The Decemberists’ chatty,

good-natured drummer/multi-instrumentalist John Moen. It’s something of a master class in understatement...

Their newest album, *The King Is Dead*, is a shock in itself—rustic, rootsy, uncomplicated, unexpectedly upbeat and full of memorable hooks, which, compared to eternally dark, weirdly experimental concept album/folk-opera *The Hazards Of Love*, is positively anthemic, animated and joyous. Even more amazingly, it has sold. In huge numbers. It has sold and sold and sold and one astonishing day earlier this year it topped the U.S. album charts. That’s crazy stuff for a band that has wilfully followed its own nose without the remotest recourse to boring things like commercial consid-

erations to pursue a determinedly indie course that’s been profoundly influenced by folk culture since Colin Meloy first adopted the name of an 1825 uprising in imperial Russia to put the first incarnation of The Decemberists together in Portland, OR, more than a decade ago.

This strange, celebratory turn of events has been overwhelmingly dampened, however, by the shocking news that Jenny Conlee, the band’s accordionist/keyboard player from Day 1 (she’d actually worked with Colin Meloy in his previous band, Calobo) has been diagnosed with breast cancer.

“It has hit us everyone pretty hard, especially Jenny, of course,” says John Moen.

"But it's hard to keep Jenny down. She's graceful at all times and they've got it early so I think it's going to be OK. She's having treatment now but we're doing some breast cancer awareness stuff and she might be able to drop in to do some shows with us here and there."

At Jenny's own insistence, they've decided not to cancel any tours, cutting out tracks reliant on keyboards until she's well enough to rejoin them ("we had some hard decisions to make and there was a lot of discussion about it all, but we decided the coolest thing would be not to try to replace Jenny on the dates") with Sara Watkins augmenting the band on violin, guitar and backing vocals in the meantime).

The other bombshell is that The Decemberists will be taking an extended break next year while they pursue individual projects, which, in Colin Meloy's case, involves a burgeoning career as an author, Meloy, who majored in creative writing at the University of Montana, has already written a book about The Replacements and is now working on a series of children's books. The first of these, *Wildwood* (which he describes as "a classic tale of adventure, magic and danger set in an alternate version of modern day Portland, Oregon") has just been published.

"We've got three more runs of shows and then we're taking a hiatus," says Moen. "That's the big plan—the do-nothing plan! Sometimes you have to take a break and then hopefully come back refreshed. We're all excited about being on the road but we've had a lot of momentum over the last few years and it will do us good to step back, and with Colin so busy writing and everything, this seems the right time. I don't know how long we'll be away, but I'm sure we'll all know when it's time to get back together."

Meanwhile, we can all bask in the beauty of an honest, down-to-earth band with their hearts in the right place making music for the right reasons achieving the sort of success usually reserved for the chancers and charlatans. They draw on many disparate influences and constantly change their whole approach from album to album, making challenging demands of their audience and thoroughly confusing pundits desperate to hang a label on them.

They tend to get called indie folk and folk-

rock—and, indeed, 1970s British bands such as Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span loom large in their terms of reference—but they never wanted to be defined by one musical terrain... and never have been. Their live shows are something of a revelation, too: wonderfully interactive and embracing multimedia elements of film, art and light shows. They even invite fans to enact some of the scenes depicted in the songs—one of the highlights of their European tour this year involved the audience screaming in unison to represent being eaten by a whale while the band pretended to die onstage as they played one of their great favourites, *The Mariner's Revenge Song*.

"It doesn't bother us unduly how people think of us," says Moen. "We just do what we do and it's up to others to describe what they think it represents. Everybody else seems to want the band to have a certain style, but when we go in to make a record all you really want to do is entertain yourself; that's what recording is all about. It's up to others what they make of it. We probably get away with a lot by meandering around in different areas, and that's potentially irritating to some people, but it's a real treat to us to have the freedom to do what we like and I can't honestly say it's ever counted against us. One thing we can say is that we are always honest about it."

"If people want to call us a folk band that's OK. As a drummer, I've been influenced by all sorts of things. Cheap Trick. Motley Crue. R.E.M. Charlie Watts of the Rolling Stones. He sounds like a human playing the drums, which is inspirational in this age of computerized beats. But that whole British folk-rock thing was important to us. Not just Fairport and Steeleye Span but obscure bands like Spriguns... I just like all that early stuff. It's all linked anyway. You know that song *Time Will Show The Wiser* on the first Fairport Convention album? Great song. Written by an American, Emmitt Rhodes. So you cross the ocean and find something from home. It's that six degrees of separation thing."

Their history includes the 18-minute track *The Tain*, based on Irish mythology, while their early career encompasses various fundraisers—including a gig that went on for several hours—to finance their self-made first album. When their equipment trailer was stolen, Meloy launched an eBay bidding

war for copies of his album of Morrissey covers to raise money for new equipment.

After various personnel shifts, the settled lineup of Meloy on vocals and guitar, Jenny Conlee (accordion, keyboards), Nate Query (bass), Chris Funk (guitar) and John Moen (drums) took them to new heights as Meloy's songwriting became ever more graphic the more it borrowed from historical events and dramatic old folklore.

In 2005 they signed to a major label—Capitol Records—a move that everyone predicted would end in tears. Either for the band or for the label. Or both. Neither happened and the relationship has worked well. The Decemberists have continued to plough their own individual, somewhat eccentric and always unpredictable furrow without a whiff of compromise, while Capitol has apparently been happy to allow them to do it and been rewarded with the steadily increasing sales, which reached a climax with the recent chart-topping summit.

Their first Capitol album, *The Crane Wife* in 2006, was pretty bold, something of a concept album based in part on a Japanese folk tale, while referencing Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. One of Meloy's songs on the album, *When The War Came*, is about the siege of Leningrad in the Second World War; and he touched even more daring and sensitive territory on *Shankill Butchers*, about the murderous deeds of a splinter group of the Ulster Volunteer Force in the 1970s. These are not the traditional lyrical themes of would-be rock stars...

Yet even this was scant preparation for the starkly charged themes of 2009's *The Hazards Of Love*, partly inspired by an EP recorded in the 1960s by the great but elusive English folk singer Anne Briggs. With



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a supernatural theme involving a recurring love tale involving a woman called Margaret, a forest, a weird shape-shifter and the voice of Becky Stark, it's been called everything from folk opera to a prog rock indulgence. Given their hard-fought major label status it appeared commercial suicide.

"At the time it totally made sense, although I guess it was a bit risky," says Moen of *The Hazards Of Love*. "It was a bit strange on purpose and it was never going to be that accessible. It built up a lot of goodwill and had great reviews, but we knew there would never be a single from it. The label was very good about it. They supported us all the way. Nobody at the label ever said, 'You can't do this. We want something they can play on the radio, we want a hit single', even though that's probably what they did want. We knew we wouldn't get any radio airplay with that one. But I think it's a good record. We're all very proud of it."

They deny, though, that *The King Is Dead* was a conscious sop to those urging them to return to a simpler, less-demanding style of good tunes and big choruses that might find a beckoning welcome on radio. Nobody was more surprised when, backstage at a gig in New York one night, they received the news that *The King Is Dead* was No. 1 in the U.S. Far from a well-aimed strategy designed to lure in the big bucks, *The King Is Dead* was an instinctive reaction to the excesses of *The Hazards Of Love*.

"It felt like a natural progression," Colin Meloy said. "I'd spent the last four years steeped in the British folk revival of the '60s and '70s and I had this kind of academic approach to it and it felt very cerebral. Once we'd done *The Hazards Of Love* I think I'd reached the apotheosis of the possibilities of what I was doing. It was really time to pull it back a bit and rediscover the music I have in my bones from being a kid, the music that got me playing to begin with."

Music like Neil Young and R.E.M. Such is the yearning soul and country-fuelled heartache of tracks like *Down By The Water* and *Don't Carry It All*, *The King Is Dead* has even been described as an homage to R.E.M., an impression encouraged by the inclusion of R.E.M.'s Peter Buck (who plays mandolin and 12-string guitar on three tracks, *Down By The Water*, *Don't*

Carry It All and *Calamity Song*), while Gillian Welch's baleful vocals also feature prominently throughout. Much play has also been made about the fact that it was recorded in a barn on a remote farm somewhere in the wilds of Oregon.

"Well... barn is a romantic idea of it; we weren't sitting on bales of hay with loads of cows wandering about. It wasn't quite like that. It was actually a big house in the country on a farm and it was a nice place to record. And growing up in Oregon, R.E.M. romanticized the country for us."

So is it an homage to R.E.M.? "I suppose that's one way of putting it—if you wanted to call it that, I wouldn't try to dissuade you, though it's not what I'd call it. However, when I was looking at the blueprint of the songs I did try and do my best Bill Berry impersonation. R.E.M. were a primary influence for me—when I came out of high school my only desire was to be in a band like R.E.M. It seemed natural to get Peter Buck involved. He lives in the town and we often see him at shows. He was around, he was available, so we asked if he fancied playing on a couple of the tracks that reminded us most of R.E.M. We thought we'd be better off admitting it than seeing what we could get away with. Happily, Peter liked the songs and agreed to do it."

And Gillian Welch? "I think we all have a romanticized view of a strong female co-singer. You know, like Neil Young and Nicolette Larson, and Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris. The songs lent themselves to a female voice, so we made a

wish list of singers we'd like to do the job and Gillian was No. 1. The whole band are big fans. We weren't sure she'd do it as she hadn't done anything for ages and it took a while for her to come around, but she did in the end..."

With further variety offered by the likes of *This Is Why We Fight* ("a liberal folk song") and *Rox In The Box* ("it was hard to fit that one in and make it work but it was worth all the effort"), The Decemberists found they'd come up with the perfect mix of ear-pleasing, radio-friendly songs that still maintained their integrity and conviction. The new influx of fans have also been duly amazed and delighted by their full-blooded stage shows, which recently included playing support to Bob Dylan.

"They cleared the whole backstage area so nobody would look at Bob when he walked through to play, can you believe that?" says John Moen, laughing. "He wasn't a big hero to me but I loved The Byrds and when I realized that half of their material was written by Dylan, it made me re-think him."

Bob didn't take you out drinking after the show then? "No... I think he's probably had enough human interaction..."

As for The Decemberists, they drank Champagne when they hit No. 1, but are far too level-headed and long in the tooth to let any of it go to their heads, putting all their positive energy into supporting stricken colleague Jenny Conlee while planning what to do on their holidays. For the sake of musical sanity and heartwarming whimsy, let's hope they're not away too long.



Sylvia Tyson

The Penguin Eggs Interview



Sylvia Tyson

Sylvia Tyson is, as writer Larry LeBlanc once said, “the Queen Mother of Canadian folk music.” Sitting in the front room of her home in Rosedale—one of Toronto’s toniest downtown areas—she pets her two furry, active black-and-white cats.

In a career that stretches back to the early '60s, when she and her then husband, Ian, took the burgeoning folk world by storm—at, among other places, the Newport Folk Festival and Carnegie Hall. She has been a songwriter, CBC Radio host (*Touch the Earth* from 1974 to 1980), singer/actor (a one-woman show called *River Road and Other Stories*), and co-founder of the ongoing group Quartette. Along the way she has recorded a dozen Ian & Sylvia albums,

eight solo, and six with Quartette.

Now, more than half a century since she began singing in small-town Chatham, ON, her career has taken another turn: her first novel, *Joyner's Dream*, has just been published by Harper Collins. A multi-generational saga of a family of musicians (and thieves and pickpockets), the book was warmly reviewed by the *Globe & Mail*: “What makes her writing soar over so many contemporaries is her ear, as she recreates the diction of men and women of varying social circumstances in diverse times and places.”

Friendly, but always reserved—especially about her early days as a folk music “star”—Sylvia Tyson answered Richard Flohil’s questions with an easy frankness.

You're 70. Is this a good time to embark on a new career as a novelist?

It's not a career yet! I do have an idea for something else, another novel, but I'll see how this one does first.

Did the fact that you're known as a songwriter and singer help?

It certainly helped get my foot in the door, and now the book is out, my background helped gain—so far—positive publicity. However, writing a book is certainly not the same as writing a song—for a start, it's not three minutes long and it doesn't have to rhyme! That said, the novelist—like the songwriter—has to step into the shoes of the person they're writing about, has to approximate their voice. You have to know the person, the character, you're writing about. Who they are, where they were born, how they think, what they do...

You lead a busy life; when did the book begin for you?

I started *Joyner's Dream* five years ago. It began with a pile of research, because it's a family saga that goes back to the middle of the 18th century and ends in 2006. The first thing I had to do was to get the language right—the way we speak now is very different from the way people spoke 250 years ago.

The response has been very positive, and I've been doing readings. The one I was most nervous about was in Halifax, where I read a section in the book that deals with the Halifax explosion in 1917; I thought people might be critical, that in some way I hadn't got the mood, the feeling, right, quite apart from the facts. But it went over very well.

The book has a dedication to Timothy Findlay, “for friendship and inspiration”...

Some years ago, I was involved in a musical version of his book *The Piano Man's Daughter*—myself, pianist Joe Sealey, (dancer) Veronica Tennant... Tiff was encouraging, and after he died his partner, Bill Whitehead, would be there whenever I lost heart. He'd read my work, make suggestions and offer encouragement...

Joyner's Dream sounds like something that needs a soundtrack...

Indeed, and there is one. It's not, however, a "Sylvia Tyson record." I was able to tap into the early music community in Toronto and create music that drew from baroque and from early English country dance music. Terry McKenna, who's involved with Tafelmusik and the Stratford Festival, played a variety of guitars. And Chris Verette played baroque violin. I wrote the melodies, I sing on some of the tracks, but it's mostly an instrumental album with pieces that could accompany the stories in the first half of the book. My partners from Quartette also sing on three of the tracks.

Later it would be nice to have a second album of ragtime, show tunes, and songs from the '40s and '50s to provide a soundtrack for the later parts of the book.

You're well-known now for your involvement with Quartette...

That began in the summer of '93 as a one-off. All of us (Caitlin Hanford, Gwen Swick and Cindy Church) have separate and equal musical careers, and we certainly didn't think, when we began, that we would still be doing it more than 15 years later. We've done two Christmas albums, so we always tour around Christmas, and we will again this year.

Do you look back to the very early days of your career? Do you still know the people who were there at the very beginning?

Not really; I've never been one to be nostalgic, or star struck. You hang out when you're young, and we did, especially in New York. And then if things go well, you become very busy, you're on the road all the time and the only time you see the people you used to spend time with is in

airports. Dylan, Joni, Leonard—all friends and acquaintances from the past, but I never see them now...

One person I kept in touch with was Suzy Rotolo, who was Bob Dylan's first girlfriend in New York; she died recently and I miss her very much.

What are your memories of those New York days? Did you really write *You Were On My Mind* in a bathtub in the Chelsea Hotel?

No, it was the Hotel Earle. I'd sit in the bath because it was the only place where the cockroaches wouldn't go. Ian and I were the first groundbreakers, and I think we paved the way for other Canadians to follow us—including Gordon [Lightfoot] and Joni [Mitchell].

That song has done very well for me; for some reason it's huge in Italy; crops up on TV shows and in commercials. [Note: It was a No. 1 Billboard easy-listening hit for *We Five* in 1965 and a No. 2 hit in the U.K. for *Crispin St. Peters*.]

And the Earle Hotel is all ritzed up now. [Note: And renamed the *Washington Square Hotel*.]

You've been singing some of your early material for many years. Can you still relate to those songs?

The best ones are the true ones. *Woman's World* was the title song on my first solo record, back in 1975; it still stands up. *The Night the Chinese Restaurant Burned Down*, which is 70 per cent truly autobiographical, is one I always sing. That's a coming-of-age song—there aren't many of those for girls, they're mostly written by guys.

You simply put yourself into the mind of the character who the song is about, and the time and the space of the story you're singing.

How do you feel about co-writing?

Ian and I didn't co-write very much, and I don't do it often. I did do a good one with Tom Russell called *Chocolate Cigarettes* and I've written a few with Shirley Eikhard, and some with Colleen Peterson. I've seen so many people arguing about

who wrote which parts of songs—or which lines, or which words. It's silly; if two people sit down to write, it's a 50/50 split...

What music are you listening to now?

Well, I listened to a lot of early English music when I was working on the book, going back to Playford's *The English Dancing Master*, a collection of songs he published in the 17th century.

I'm sure there are really good artists performing now, but (their music) doesn't speak to me. I don't listen to records anymore because most of the music that's being made now isn't aimed at me, so I don't have much interest in it. But I read a great deal, including detective fiction...

Ian recently published an autobiography. What did you think of it?

Well, it was very Ian. Let's leave it at that!

What's next in your career?

Well, I've been seriously involved in doing promotion for the new book, so I've pulled back from performing for a while, apart from the readings. But I'll be getting back to it; Quartette will be active again, and we'll certainly do a bunch of Christmas dates. I'm still writing songs, and I'm still involved with the Canadian Songwriters' Hall of Fame—I was made interim president a few years ago, and I still am.



Ian and Sylvia Tyson

REVIEWS



"I reckon the term psych folk could well be just another name for bloody awful. They sound like people who don't actually like British folk music, and so would rather strangle it." – Oak Ash Thorn, Page 89

"This latest effort is consistently good from start to finish—full of the usual astute, pithy lyrics and discerning melodies sung with that attractive, minimalist, moody McCartney-esque vocal delivery." – Ron Sexsmith, Page 73



Gentecorum

Nagez Rameurs (Routes et Archets)

It's been three years since Gentecorum's last release, *La Bibournoise*, which (justifiably!) won the trio a CFMA for traditional album of the year. *Nagez Rameurs* (Pull, *Rowers!*) finds our boys exploring themes of voyaging and the New World with more songs and tunes from the Quebecois tradition.

The record exhibits incredible depth and *joie de vivre*, a hallmark of the group since their first release, *Le Galarneau*. Highlights include the lightly phased podorhythmie on the hypnotic *Reel Circulaire*, the delightfully a cappella title track, or Simon Riopel's touching *La valse de poëles*. But in truth it's all wonderful stuff and *Nagez Rameurs* demonstrates, yet again, why Gentecorum are one of the country's most vital traditionally rooted outfits.

— By Richard Thornley

k.d. lang and the Siss Boom Bang

Sing It Loud (Notesuch Records)

Getting together with a new band, including co-writers Daniel Clarke, Joshua Grange

and co-producer Joe Pisapia, seems to have given k.d. lang a new vigour and focus. Gone are the fuzzy dance/electronica influences of her past couple of albums and she's back to a tight Americana/roots/rock/blues/folk feel with a soaring and yearning acoustic/slide sound (albeit with shimmering keyboards) accompanied by tight, tasteful drums with a lingering shuffle beat that wouldn't be out of place on any classic blues or rock record.

The sound as a whole is beautifully balanced and produced and the songwriting is some of lang's best yet. If you've put k.d. lang out of the stable lately, now's the time to rope her back in. All her influences from jazz to blues (even a slight bossa nova) are here but melded into a classic fusion that lets her be her still-country self, yet have toes in many pools.

The comparison that comes to mind is Willie Nelson for a performer that remains soulfully true to himself while exploring a range of musical textures. Lang seems to exude that kind of confidence and relaxation on this disc.

On *Inglewood*, she sings, "Take me to a place / where music sounds good again / A place where I could have been / The place I should have been." This sounds like it. She even includes a warm, slide-drenched version of Talking Heads' *Heaven*.

— By Barry Hammond

Fleet Foxes

Helplessness Blues (Sub Pop)

Not many albums list a luthier in the production credits, and Fleet Foxes' *Helplessness Blues* (or Helpless Helpless Helpless blues, as I like to call it) is probably the only album on the formerly noise-mongering Seattle label Sub Pop to boast

that distinction. To be sure, the band's sophomore effort is, first and foremost, a sunbath of chiming acoustic instrumentation as well as sublime vocal harmonies.

Sure it's easy to pick out the ostensible influences on display—Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; the Dead; My Morning Jacket; even a little Frankie Valli—but the thing the Foxes seem to share with their obvious precursors (or contemporaries, as the case may be) is ambition, and a flair for the concise epic.

Songs like *Bedouin Dress* and blatantly CSNY-indebted *The Plains/Bitter Danger* have a suite-like sense of structure, the former suddenly bursting into a bouncy jig, the latter transforming its recurring melodic motif to advance its journey narrative. Then there's the live-sounding acoustic strum-down that erupts out of the airy, choral *Sim Sala Bim*. And yet the album is remarkably cogent for being composed of roughly a million ideas.

— By Scott Lingley

Elephant Revival

Break in the Clouds (Ruff Shod Records)

They call it transcendental folk. I'd add neo-hippy to the description, and that's not intended to be disparaging. There's something about the gentle feel of Elephant



Reviews

Revival's lyrics that Donovan would have found comfortable in 1968. A cricket in the kitchen, asking questions such as, "What is time?" Rejoicing over a break in the clouds. It's all about a sense of wonder, and there's nothing wrong with that.

This young acoustic quintet from Colorado is easy to listen to, even without mood enhancement. With five singers, including two women, the vocals are strong, especially the haunting voice of Bonnie Paine.

And they're all multi-instrumentalists, playing mandolin, fiddle, banjo, washboard and even musical saw. There are no upcoming Bela Flecks or David Grisman (Grismen?), but Elephant Revival is not all about flash. This is a band where the whole is greater than

the sum of the parts, with tasty arrangements. There is some magic happening here.

— By Mike Sadava

Stephen Fearing and Andy White

Fearing and White (Lowden Proud Records)

This debut album, a collaboration of Stephen Fearing and Andy White, features 13 songs that came to life, according to their story, because of a friendship spanning 10 years, with eight years of annual liaisons so they could write together somewhere in the world while working around the crammed schedules of a pair successful touring musicians.

White now calls Melbourne, Australia, home, while Fearing recently moved to Halifax, so hurrah that they found a spare three weeks in Ontario to re-

cord it and pull it off. And pull it off they did. Another happy example of sums of parts being greater as a whole. The duo and the record—not one song stands out above the others and neither one's voice dominates but blend perfectly—Fearing and White have concocted a fabulous recipe for a terrific listening experience.

Underlying the excellent, gently rocking arrangements is a fabulous, old-timey pop sensibility—in the best sense of whatever that means to you—and a palpable feeling of joy. I instantly get that Andy and Stephen had great fun making this joyful noise. All projects should sound and feel this good.

The result is a group of songs you instantly embrace because of their overall feel rather than

any particular snatch of piercingly perceptive lyric or any one of many classy guitar riffs.

Fearing and White have put together a record that they should both be proud of, one that stands tall alone and also fits perfectly as a part of their stellar past efforts.

— by les siemieniuk

Robert Johnson

The Centennial Collection (Columbia Legacy)

Isn't it amazing how the dear departed are more prolific in death than they ever were when they were alive? In blues circles, Johnson's scant output has always been held in a place of honour—and his stature as a mythical entity has only grown with passing years, his music, the Holy Grail of early acoustic blues.

Despite the fact that every-

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Robert Johnson

one who cares likely owns the original box set, *The Complete Recordings* (1990, Columbia/Legacy), there's a reason behind this two-option remaster (a two-CD or elaborate four-CD deluxe edition, inclusive of hardcover book, musical context and DVD documentary): it marks the celebration of Johnson's 100th birthday.

And why not? That Johnson captured the interest of the world at large years after his sad life ended—a not uncommon occurrence in the category—is worthy of remembrance. Johnson's music, none of which was originally his, is best known for his ability to deliver it in an uncommon way. From an element of humour found behind the lyric to the wide emotional range he was capable of employing, from an overall playful nature he seemed to command to his surprising ability on guitar, these are all worth remembering.

Given that the revamped double-CD set offers up 111 minutes versus the 105 of the previous outing (representing only one additional alternate take), the budding blues scholar might spring for the more

elaborate collection to truly enjoy a more vivid immersion of the man, his story, his era and his overall contribution so many years ago. For the rest of us, a reverent revisit may be tribute enough.

— By Eric Thom

Rory Gallagher

Rory Gallagher, *Deuce*, *Live In Europe*, *Blueprint*, *Irish Tour*, *Notes From San Francisco* (Eagle Records)

Perhaps in an effort to cash in on the wave of Irish euphoria capped off by Queen Elizabeth II's historic visit to the Emerald Isle in May, this spring Eagle Rock Entertainment re-released a half-dozen discs by the legendary blues rocker Rory Gallagher.

Back in the day, a lot of guitar-slingers were playing blues-based rock 'n' roll—but none better than Rory Gallagher. His early studio albums garnered him a loyal following, even in the far-flung reaches of Canada.

Earliest of the discs is the self-titled *Rory Gallagher*, first issued in 1971, which shows off the young rocker at his precocious best, fresh off the breakup of his band Taste. There's a crisp, innocent feel to this one,

almost veering into pop on a few songs.

Deuce, not surprisingly his second album, also from 1971, has Rory stretching out his guitar licks and we begin to hear the clipped vocal delivery that he would exhibit for the rest of his career.

The third CD in this six-pack of releases is *Live In Europe* from 1972, recorded at various unnamed venues in February and March that year. This sizzling disc captures Rory at his best—live. The power that flowed from his trademark 1961 Fender Stratocaster energized his live shows like no one else could.

Irish Tour, originally released in 1974 and digitally remastered in this release, was everything fans denied a true live experience could hope for: pulsing, driving, blues-drenched riffs and soaring solos that surely must spin out of control, but never did. These two live discs, with not one of the 19 total songs duplicated, serve as a brilliant compendium of Rory onstage.

Irish Tour is composed of songs recorded at three stops on the eponymous tour, Belfast's Ulster Hall, Dublin's Carleton Cinema and Cork's City Hall.

Few artists dared venture into the region because of the Troubles; Rory Gallagher was one of the few who dismissed the danger. The devotion and appreciation from the audiences at these three venues is infectious, bespeaking the unifying power of music.

Some of Gallagher's finest compositions, such as *Cradle Rock*, *Tattoo'd Lady* and *Walk On Hot Coals*, are here in all their dynamic glory.

Blueprint, originally released in 1973, is arguably Gallagher's best studio album. This re-release features two bonus tracks, *Stompin' Ground* and *Treat Her Right*.

And finally, we come to *Notes From San Francisco*, a two-disc, 24-track album with the first CD featuring 12 studio recordings and the second a live, 12-song set recorded in December 1979 at The Old Waldorf in San Francisco. The only doubles from previously mentioned live recordings are *Bullfrog Blues* and *Tattoo'd Lady*, two songs that are vintage Gallagher and bear repeating. The studio set is less bluesey and more straight-ahead rock 'n' roll, showcasing a polished and mature artist. The live CD features a now-sea-



Rory Gallagher



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soned performer playing to his strengths, laying down the grooves and venturing into extended solos that give him free rein to demonstrate his prodigious talent.

All of these re-issues create a comprehensive anthology of Rory Gallagher's distinguished career, a treasure for longtime fans and a remarkable opportunity for new converts to indulge themselves in the music of one of the best blues rockers our planet has produced.

Rory died in June 1995 due to complications from a liver transplant. As long as there are guitar purists who debate the greatest players of all time, Rory Gallagher will be in the conversation.

— By Doug Swanson

Red Dog Ash

Red Dog Ash (Valley Heat Records)

With a name like Red Dog Ash and a repertoire laden with coal mining allusions, you would expect this quartet to hail from the shadows of the Appalachian Mountains. Yet only guitarist and principal songwriter Jason Winfree was raised in West Virginia. Dixon Smith (banjo) is from Connecticut, Gary Vessel (mandolin) lives in Modesto, CA, and Eli Arrigotti (stand-up bass) is from Los Angeles. You'd never know it by their sound.

Call it bluegrass or new-grass or neo-traditional, this debut disc sizzles from start to finish, getting stronger with each successive tune.

The title track is a powerful condemnation of the centuries-long deadly toll extracted by coal mines and their rapacious owners. *Bella's Bedtime Waltz* is a delight and there is one girl who is lucky, indeed, to have a namesake song such as this.

You can feel the oppressive temperatures in *Valley Heat*, relate to the desperation of the despicable character in *On The Run*, bleed with the migrant workers in *Hello Florence Thompson*. We'll hear more from these lads.

— By Doug Swanson

No Blues

Hela Hela (Productiehuis ON)

This is the fourth, and apparently last, album by an aggregation assembled in 2004 by Dutch record label Oost-Nederland (ON). The three-day experimental session in broaching Arabic music and blues was a raging success, slide guitar and bass forming a natural confluence with the sound of the oud, and shifting Arabic rhythms dovetailing with blues storytelling cadences.

The three original musicians are joined on *Hela Hela* by a slew of guests, including a violin player and female vocalist from Galilee, and a percussionist from Sudan. As with the previous albums, blues vocals are in English, while this album adds vocals in other (unspecified) languages as well, singing melodic lines which augment the Middle Eastern side of the balance sheet.

The band wastes no time in establishing grooves of all sorts, all of which work well. They've become masters of the genre they created, which they've dubbed 100-per-cent Arabicana. No explanations or regrets are appended to the very brief statement that this is the last No Blues album. That's a shame, as the group unfolded delightful discoveries on each of their previous CDs, and *Hela Hela* continues the success story.

— By Lark Clark



Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel

Simon and Garfunkel

Bridge Over Troubled Water (Columbia Legacy)

First released in 1970, my initial copy barely lasted a weekend. Bought on a Friday, I flogged it to a carpenter on a jobsite the following Tuesday. Too polished for my tastes at the time, despite its beautifully brilliant songs—*The Boxer*, *The Only Living Boy In New York*, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, *El Condor Pasa*... It sold 25 million copies worldwide and marked the final studio album Simon and Garfunkel would ever record together. Now repackaged with a bonus disc recorded live in 1969 and two hours of film footage on DVD, encapsulating their thoughts and performances around that time, as well as current interviews about the making of the record with most of the participants, it amounts to an abundance of fascinating and often raw substance that stretches far beyond the realm of nostalgia.

As an album, *Bridge Over Troubled Water* clearly stands the test of time. If it's not in your record collection it really ought to be. I replaced my first copy years ago. And yes, it remains immaculately polished. Yet there's often a subtle political barb here and there that escaped me the first time around. Paul Simon, undoubtedly, is one of the great songwriters of his generation. While he could write fluff such as *At The Zoo* ("The monkeys stand for honesty...") or *Punky's Dilemma* ("Wish I was a Kellogg's Cornflake..."), he could also write insightful, heartfelt, gorgeously simple lyrics.

Look no farther than *The Sound of Silence*: "The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls / And tenement halls." Or the gospel-inspired *Bridge Over Troubled Water*: "When you're weary / Feeling small / When tears are in your eyes / I will dry them all..." Masterful.

All of these above-mentioned

tracks show up in one guise or another in this box set. And while the live segment offers insight into how several of the *Bridge*'s tracks sounded before they were recorded, the real bonus is in the interviews describing the often unorthodox studio methods used to fashion the unique sound of this album. Clearly in Roy Halee, they had a producer as intuitive, innovative and daring as The Beatles' George Martin. Both were able to create extraordinary recordings on crude equipment.

Just as important, though, is how hard Simon and Art Garfunkel worked on their harmonies. From the evidence presented, it appears they spent every spare moment singing together. The proof, of course, lies in this landmark album. History has judged it accordingly.

— By Roddy Campbell

The Waifs

Temptation (Compass)

Cards on the table: I've never liked The Waifs. Not that I've ever listened to them, not really, but I guess I was turned off by the adulation that greeted their first few Canadian folk fest appearances and never turned

back on.

So *Temptation* is, for me, a significant revelation because it's an unadulterated delight from start to finish! It kicks off with the sultry, bluesy *I Learn The Hard Way*, follows up with a paean to masculinity in *Buf-falo*, then smacks you breathless with *Just Like Me*, a sad, sad story of addiction.

Elsewhere there's Josh Cunningham's ominous *Moses and the Lamb* and the soon-to-be-campfire-classic *Goodbye Darlin'*. Great lashings of blues and gospel throughout, as befits the album's biblical themes, and lots of attention clearly given to keeping things rooted. Which leads me to suspect that I might have been wrong about The Waifs all along. Back to the back catalogue!

— By Richard Thornley

Rory Block

Shake 'em On Down: A Tribute to Mississippi Fred McDowell (Story Plain)

When it comes to acoustic blues, Rory Block is a poster child. Her guitar skills alone vault her to the top of the list, yet her vocals help anchor whatever emotions remain untouched by her soulful playing style. Influenced at a young age



The Waifs

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by face-to-face introductions to some of the key progenitors of the blues, Block remains mesmerized to this day. Of her 26 releases, three have channeled blues masters like Robert Johnson, Son House and McDowell—like few before her have been able to do with such passion and loving adoration.

Living with this music as she does, her originals are ripe with authenticity and her ability to master others' techniques has prepared her to develop a style that is a thoughtful amalgam. The dozen tracks presented here incorporate subtle enhancements—*Good Morning Little School Girl* has become "Boy" for obvious reasons, while fresh compositions like *The Breadline*, constructed from a collection of his best-known riffs, incorporate new lyrics to relate the Depression McDowell lived through in his era to the tough times of our own.

Mississippi Man recounts her meeting with the man while the opener, *Ready Freddy*, takes license with his story, as if told by the late, great bluesman. This is the sort of insight and dedication Block brings to any project—and *Shake 'Em On Down* relates and reinvents some of his best-known songs for new and old audiences alike, embellished to reinforce melodies or some of the lost magic that time has worn off. As tributes go, this resets the standard.

—By Eric Thom

Brian Blain

New Folk Blues (independent)

Warm, affable Brian Blain is a fixture in and around Toronto—wherever good music is played. A journey-

man musician himself, the 50-year veteran of many a campfire jam session seems quite comfortable in his shoes, issuing this nine-song release that swaggers with newfound confidence, buoyed by the success of his download-friendly *The Old Whaler's Confession*. Inspired by a real-life trip to Boston, Blain sings about what he knows—and real life is what he knows best. From the original opener that tells a tale of Northern Blues Records to the highlight of *Forgotten*, with its rocking, guitar-driven groove, Blain is coming of age like never before. His singing voice tends to assume the voice of his characters, from a soft, half-talking whisper to a full-fledged croon as required.

The jazz-friendly George Koller adds a surprisingly full sound to each composition, delivering everything from a robust, rhythmic swinging element to bowed special effects like the true-to-life whale sounds of *Confession*. Koller's professionalism clearly challenges Blain's game throughout—and he meets the challenge. His singing voice is in fine form and his guitar playing, especially, has never been better. A storyteller by nature, Blain tackles a few choice tales across this too-short disc, as Koller's warm, oversize, acoustic bass lines create a platform for Blain to build on.

From the fully French *Ramene Moi Demain* to a buoyant song referencing Arlo Guthrie's *Alice's Restaurant* (*Another Song About Alice*), Blain is comfy in his easy chair, blending casual observation with humour

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Cowboy Celtic: l to r—David Wilkie, Joe Hertz, Keri Lynn Zwicker and Denise Withnell

and rhyme.

From his loving recollection of Lenny Breau in the soft-spoken *Last Time I Saw Lenny* to *Ghost of Clinton's Tavern*, there's much lively fun here. Recorded live at Toronto's Reba's Café, it's Blain's best foot forward. To celebrate, a live, extended download is available from the artist.

—By Eric Thom

Denise Withnell

Rose Petal Pie (Centerfire Music)

Like a rose petal pie, this disc was something of a surprise. We know that Denise Withnell and David Wilkie can do country and Celtic music from their work with the band Cowboy Celtic but who knew they might be even more talented at western swing and jazz?

Wilkie and Withnell fuse their talents with poet Paul Zarzyski and several other musicians around Open Path Studios in San Jose, CA, including Gordon Stevens (bass and plucked viola; he was associated with the band Moby Grape), Scott Sorkin (guitars), Denny Berthiaume (piano), Jason Lewis (drums), Tim Volpicella (guitar), Kristen Strom (soprano and tenor sax and clarinet),

Paul Anastasio (fiddle) and several others. They serve up not only some extremely talented originals (*Flyin'*, *Not Fallin'*, *In Love With You*, *The Man With The Mandolin*, *Rose Petal Pie*, *Bourbon On Ice*, *Monsoon*), some standards (*I've Got To Wonder Where He Went Blues*, *South Of The Border* and *Slow Poke*) and a few by other writers (*Goin' Away Party* by Cindy Walker, *Let Me Make It Up To You Tonight* by Roy Forbes, *I Get Lonely For You* by Hugh Moffatt, and *Pas de chance en amour* by Katy Moffatt).

The result is a delightfully sweet jazz confection with overtones of Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks that's completely delectable to the ears. It's a one-off creation that leaves the listener hoping for more.

—By Barry Hammond

Cowboy Celtic

Other People's Cattle (Centerfire Music)

Back in 2005 when I was reviewing Cowboy Celtic's fifth CD, *The Saloon Sessions*, I somehow totally missed that Keri Lynn Zwicker, their harp player, was the same Keri Lynn whose *The Devil's Mill* (produced by Shannon Johnson) has been repeatedly showing up

on my CD player since it was given to me by a friend in the late '90s. Duh. Well done, Keri!

Now that's out of the way, their new CD has more of the same that made that one a keeper: fine musicianship like Keri's on *Princess Royal* and Joseph Hertz's on *Amuيرة Reel/The Ghost's Welcome*, *Jug Of Punch/Return to Chernobyl*. There are warm vocals like Denise Withnell's on *The Water Is Wide*, *Lady Margaret Hamilton* and the title song (written by Sid Marty), and great songwriting, guitar playing, producing

and arranging by David Wilkie.

One of the few bands that explores the many connections between Celtic and country, they should be declared a national treasure (and perhaps one day they will be). Until then, pick up and enjoy this richly varied slice of both traditional and current musicianship of both the isles and the Prairies. Fine stuff.

—By Barry Hammond

Folk Thief

Love Heartaches and Oblivion (Independent)

From Kamloops, BC, now settled in Vancouver, Dave Hadgkiss comes bearing the moniker the Folk Thief. Who is that masked man?

Judging by his short history, he's been honing his craft around B.C. for the past little while and is just starting to spread the word, venturing out to other parts of Canada this summer. Well, he's ready and the rest of Canada needs to hear him.

Love Heartache and Oblivion sticks to the basics—a boy and his guitar with a very talented friend, Kelly Haigh, lending some lovely backup vocals. Mike Cashin taps out some



Reviews

tasty, understated percussion as well. The result is an eminently listenable piece of work, mellow and reflective with some lovely guitar picking. Dave is a dab hand with his guitar and obviously paid attention in English class. He can string words into interesting sentences.

"Everybody wanna be the first in line / You gotta get it while the getting's good and I got mine / Livin' isn't livin' if you're killin' time, it's dyin' / Smoke 'em if you got 'em goes the battle cry / You gotta show 'em what you're made of baby don't be shy / Killing isn't killing with a flag held high—it's destiny."

Love Heartache and Oblivion is a definite example of less is more. The Folk Thief stole my heart with this lovely debut.

— by les siemieniuk

Ben Sures

Gone to Bolivia (Independent)

Ben Sures, based in Edmonton, AB, these days, has been, over the last 20 years or so, forging a sturdy career by writing, playing, touring, and putting out albums—each one better than the last ... just as it should be.

In *Gone to Bolivia*, his eighth, he has put out his best work yet and it is as good a piece of work as any I have heard. From the terrific opening *American Shantytown*—"If there's trouble in America then there's trouble everywhere"—12 originals and one Mose Allison tune follow and not a runt in the litter. *The Boy Who Walked Backwards Through the Snow* is a heartbreaking retelling of some dark Canadiana. I loved the title track, a catchy political

pop song.

Ben also wisely surrounded himself with helpers such as producer Don Kerr of the Rheostatics along with Claire Jenkins, the Good Lovelies and Michelle Rumball, the original singer of the Grievous Angels, and some of the Creaking Tree String Quartet, adding to the quality of the adventurous musicianship on the album. Ben has hit one over the fence with this release.

— by les siemieniuk

Cahalen Morrison and Eli West

The Holy Coming of the Storm (Independent)

Despite the ominous title—the lyrical content is not overtly pious—this disc heralds the arrival of a compelling duo rather than the end of times.

In the liner notes, fiddler and all-around musical entrepreneur Dirk Powell describes the sound as western bluegrass. Their website (www.cahalenandeli.com) alludes to a new strain that crosses bluegrass with old-time and high-lonesome harmonies. They're all of that and more.

These guys are as comfortable as your favourite pair of blue jeans. Delightful melodies, mostly penned by Morrison, are driven by clawhammer banjo, mandolin and bouzouki.

But the true joy is to be found in the harmonies, in turns lush and vibrant, sulky and mournful. This is a stunning debut and the sophomore release is eagerly anticipated.

At press time, their only Canadian date this summer is the Islands Folk Festival at

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Duncan, BC, July 22-24. Pop by if you're in the neighbourhood; you won't regret it.

— By Doug Swanson

Oh Susanna

Soon The Birds (Outside Music)

Oh Susanna has a voice like butter. It's yummy and addictive. Her latest release, *Soon The Birds*, spreads thinly on homemade bread. Cut the crusts off. Pour up a cup of tea. Perfect company for a rainy day, or songs for long Sunday drives. Thematically, Oh Susanna muses on home, love and old friends. As a narrative songwriter, Oh Susanna has found her voice. Pensive, purposeful, reflective all describe her approach to the craft.

Drunk As A Sailor makes for a coy opener, while *So Long* bids a bittersweet farewell. She lets her heart flow with *Millions of Rivers*, hops on a *Long Black Train*, and counts herself as one of the *Lucky Ones*. By far the album's most emotional song, *What Old Friends Do*, echoes the sentiment only someone dearest to your heart under-

stands. *Soon The Birds* ends on a hopeful note; the closing title track soars. Those folks at Outside Music sure know how to sign 'em.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

John Reischman and the Jaybirds

Vintage and Unique (Corvus Records)

To these ears, any John Reischman disc is worth a listen, if only for the tone and chops of the master on his Gibson Lloyd Loar mandolin.

But, as usual, there's much more on a Jaybirds disc than appeal to mando maniacs like myself. In the five albums they have put out, the Jaybirds have evolved a gentle, melodic form of bluegrass, with a tinge of old-time.

The album is a lovely combination of traditional tunes, originals and instrumentals, and is clearly a band effort. Every member of the quintet has contributed at least one tune. Standouts include *The Cypress Hills*, a cowboy ballad inspired by the great author Wallace Stegner co-written by Reisch-

man and songwriter Susan Crowe. Bassist Trisha Gagnon's *Gold Mountain* adds a new twist to railway songs, describing the emotional turmoil of the Chinese workers who built the Canadian railways.

And, not surprisingly, the instrumentals are the icing on the cake. *Lancaster Sound*, written by fiddler Greg Spatz, was inspired by his great-great uncle, the Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin, whose ill-fated search for the Northwest Passage epitomized the concept of high and lonesome.

— By Mike Sadava

Matheu Watson

Matheu Watson (Independent)

Holy shit, this guy is hot (in the musical sense of the word)! Hot! A Scottish multi-instrumentalist, composer and all-around renaissance guy, Matheu Watson has already played with a *Who's Who* of trad musicians including Paddy Keenan, Fred Morrison and Salsa Celtica (among others). On this, his debut album, he plays mostly trad and self-composed tunes, aided and abetted by the likes of Martin Simpson (!), Kris Drever, Ali Hutton, Sean Óg

Graham, Martin O'Neill and James Lindsay.

The sets of tunes range from the contemplative *Drying Out* to the sunny *Picnic* to the rocket-fuelled *Reunion*. It's all imaginatively arranged and trumpets the arrival of a stellar new talent. Hunt it down.

— By Richard Thornley

Gibson Brothers

Help My Brother (Compass Records)

There's plenty of good pickin' and fine singing on this 12-track recording, the 10th release from Leigh and Eric Gibson.

The siblings swap lead vocals almost equally, a sharing arrangement that would make their mother proud and makes the listener glad. One can assume these boys have been singing together since they were tots, and that long familiarity manifests itself in harmonies that transcend just two voices singing the same lyrics. This is a powerful symbiosis.

Standout tracks include *Dixie* (no, not that *Dixie*), a paean to Elvis's molecular link to the South; *Talk To Me*, a wonderful collaboration with Claire Lynch; and *One Car Funeral*, a poignant dirge the brothers co-



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wrote with Jon Weisberger.

There's swing, songs of longing, two-steps, hardcore bluegrass and the top-notch musicianship you would expect.

— By Doug Swanson

Jonathan Byrd

Cackalack (Waterbug Records)

It's a long way from Cape Fear to Lake Ontario, but Jonathan Byrd has managed to find a following in Canada.

Thanks to Toronto songsmith Corin Raymond, Byrd, who hails from North Carolina, has toured extensively north of the border and now he's got a new disc recorded with some of Toronto's best musicians.

It took just six hours to record the 10 tracks on *Cackalack* in Ken Whiteley's studio with the Foggy Hogtown Boys and others, including Raymond, who contributes background vocals and Whiteley, who plays some National steel guitar. This is live off the floor, with no overdubs, no headphones, and no pitch control. Just a pot of soup on the stove and some great playing.

Byrd, who is no slouch on guitar, is becoming one of my favourite up-and-coming songwriters. He can write sing-along stompers like *Chicken*

Wire, a moving ode to his late dad called *Father's Day*, or the ingeniously constructed *I Was An Oak Tree*, about a tree that becomes a slave ship that becomes firewood after being washed ashore. It's no wonder Canadians are discovering him.

— By Mike Sadava

Mighty Squirrel

Sqworld Record (Independent)

As much as the name Mighty Squirrel suggests hillbilly roadkill cuisine, best cooked on a hot engine block, there is nothing backwoods about this disc.

This is a side project for four of the best roots musicians in the Pacific Northwest—Ivan Rosenberg, David Keenan and the husband and wife fiddle team of Greg Spatz and Caridwen Irvine-Spatz. But the collection of "old World-time" tunes is more of an ethnomusicological main course rather than a side dish.

The quartet manages to travel the world in 10 tracks, bringing in elements of traditional English and Irish, 13th century Ladino-Sephardic, Klezmer, and even western swing. With lots of twin fiddles, banjo, bouzouki, mandolin and resonator guitar, the Squirrel creates a mighty smorgasbord for the ears.

Yes, it is heavy on traditions (and how does Irvine-Spatz manage to be fluent in so many languages?). But there are some off-the-wall elements here, especially in the two songs written by multi-instrumentalist Keenan.

Like the annoying squirrels in my attic, Mighty Squirrel won't stand still. Rosenberg has left, and has been replaced by Seattle accordion player Nova Devonie. I can hardly wait to see the new menu.

— By Mike Sadava





Emmylou Harris

Hard Bargain (Nonesuch)

There's not much question, as far as I'm aware, about Emmylou Harris's continuing stature as both artist of integrity and strikingly beautiful human. But just like the way the camera finds her standing apart, half-lit and a little out of focus on the cover of her new album, the production veneer that has grown up around the recorded version of Harris seems to mediate the intimacy of the experience disproportionately.

It's not that her distinctive voice isn't front and centre or even that the songs are over-arranged—they're all performed by Harris, producer Jay Joyce and percussionist/keyboardist Giles Reaves—and to be fair fine moments abound across 13 self-penned originals (normally this would oblige a reviewer to note that Harris is better known as an interpreter of other people's songs, but since this is the third album in a decade where she's taken on the bulk of the writing duties, I think we

can skip it).

But I wish more of those moments were like the mostly simple, unvarnished opening to the hair-raising *My Name Is Emmett Till*, in which Harris declaims the victim's-eye-view of a notoriously brutal 1950s race murder. There's no reason fans should be anything but delighted with *Hard Bargain*, but I think the time is ripe for a stripped-down, warts-and-all Emmylou Harris album—a woman alone in a room with her guitar and some songs.

—By Scott Lingley

Yasmin Levy

Sentir (Adama Music)

Yasmin Levy is the standard bearer for Sephardic music, the music of Moorish Spain's Jews. Her father, Yitzhak Levy, was a cantor in Istanbul and upon creation of the Israeli state worked with Israel's national radio. His life's work was devoted to the collection and preservation of the songs of Sephardic Jews, in the Ladino language. Armed with the bulky tape recorders of his time, he recorded every Ladino song and hymn he encountered, compiling a total of 14 books of music.

Yasmin was under two years old when her father passed away, but as her passion for singing developed she was guided and inspired by this vast inheritance. Yasmin has taken on the mission of preserving this rich trove of songs and introducing them to the world at large.

Her style has been influenced by her study of flamenco during her residence in Spain, but she has developed her own distinct approach, a pulsating ebb and flow of dynamics and a plangent, heartbroken tone with rich ornamentation and vibrato.

Sentir is Yasmin's fourth album, produced by Grammy

Award-winner Javier Limon in Madrid. The arrangements are piercingly beautiful—wailing horns, flamenco guitars and bouzouki, trumpet and ney flute, with a crystalline clarity in the production sound. The dramatic beauty of Yasmin Levy's voice and the powerful emotion of these songs have become, for me, the very definition of musical passion.

—By Lark Clark

Curro Fuentes and the Big Band Cumbia and Descarga Sound of Colombia 1962-72

Cartagena! (Soundway Records)

Soundway Records describes itself as being "dedicated to re-releasing lost and forgotten recordings from the world's most vibrant musical cultures." That journey began in Ghana for label founder Miles Cleret. Knocked out by the vintage sounds he heard in that African country, he determined to gather old recordings and release them from his U.K. home.

That was more than 20 CDs ago. *Cartagena!*, the latest release from Soundway Records, points the spotlight on some outrageously energetic music from Colombia's Caribbean

coast during the 1960s. All the tracks were produced by Curro Fuentes, the youngest son of the family that founded Colombia's renowned record label Disco Fuentes.

A music fanatic from childhood, Curro returned from a trip to New York with the ambition to "encourage musicians" in Colombia, which he proceeded to do for the next decade, putting out scores of 45s, which were snapped up by an adoring, dancing audience.

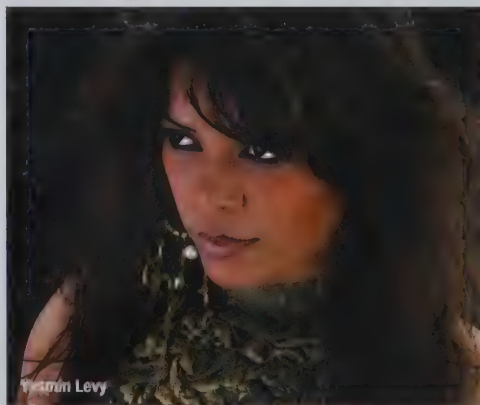
These tracks are bursting with inventive horn lines, coro-style vocals, African percussion, and salsa-dura bass. Well-produced and wisely selected, with an assist from Will (Quantic) Holland, who lives in Colombia, this is a terrific retrospective of a genre that has never travelled abroad before. Ear-opening and tons of fun.

—By Lark Clark

Matt Epp and the Amorian Assembly

At Dawn (Independent)

I like Matt Epp and the Amorian Assembly. I like that the Amorian Assembly is the two-man rhythm section, and that the bass player looks like Black Sabbath's Geezer Butler



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Reviews

in the CD booklet. I like that Matt Epp purports to reside in the empire of Amorita, even though there's a blatant MAPL stamped on the back of his album. But I probably wouldn't like any of these things about Matt Epp if I weren't completely bowled over by *At Dawn*.

Heart-on-tattered-flannel-sleeve Canadian roots-rock albums lie thick on the ground—you have only to peruse this CD review section to see that's true—but few of them strike the balance of songwriting (wryly poetic), performances (tastefully impassioned), arrangement and production (warm and wisely judged) and instant memorability you'll find in songs like *Don't Let the Sun Go Down* and the impending radio smash *Met Someone*, the album's opening one-two punch. The wit and poignancy of Epp's words and voice scarcely flag over eight more songs, nor does the musical uplift laid on by his gifted collaborators. To say more is to belabour the point—this is the kind of record that makes its own friends.

—By Scott Lingley

The Heartbroken

Tonight Tonight (Independent)

The Heartbroken write songs from the organ that rules it all—the heart. *Tonight Tonight* sifts through the ventricles and valves of human relationship, from lovelorn to loveless. If you're a fan of Damhnait Doyle, this is the record for you. It's got her usual glossy vocals, bubble gum hooks and conjures up matters of the heart. Accompanied by Stuart Cameron, Peter Fusco and Blake Manning, the

band recorded at The Tragically Hip's famous Bathouse Studio in Kingston.

When you're *Too Weak for The Truth*, it's time to *Save Yourself*. The Heartbroken *Couldn't Help Myself*, so *Save Yourself*. Spare yourself the trouble, the album's single, *Seventeen*, is as cliché as expected. For a band that formed to rehash the good old days, it's not surprising the material is a bit retrospective. I suppose if you like to drink and muck around, what better reason than to start a band filled with *All My Friends*.

—By Shannon Webb-Campbell

One Hundred Dollars

Songs of Man (Outside)

If you thought an album by a psychedelia-tinged alt-country band from Toronto was the very last thing you needed, the new one by One Hundred Dollars could probably change your mind in the first two or three songs. The magic here is rooted in the songwriting chemistry between vocalist Simone Schmidt and guitarist Ian Russell, who empathetically marry hard-scrabble lives with few consolations to plaintive melodies and plainspoken but portentous diction.

Rare is the lyric sheet that actually deserves to be read, but Schmidt's words look on the page like southern Gothic prose, and her emotionally raw voice, which sounds enough at times like Julie Doiron, Olenka Krakus and even Exene Cervenka that it doesn't sound like any of them, gives these clear-eyed hard-scrabbled tales the heft of reported fact.

The quaver that shivers through her as she sings,

Reviews



"Love me while you're waiting on another / love me a while" over a twangy Telecaster lead is definitely all her own, and she brings more than enough edginess to the proceedings to hold her own against the visceral din the songs sometimes demand. If you love The Sadies—and that describes a lot of people I know—you owe One Hundred Dollars a chance.

—By Scott Lingley

Tabadoul Orchestra World Wide Wahab (Westpark Music)

The Tabadoul Orchestra is dedicated to the music of Egypt's Mohammed Abdel Wahab, who has been called the most important composer of Arabian music in the 20th century. Based in Cologne, Germany, Tabadoul is the first ensemble in Europe to present this material.

Wahab has been described as the Frank Zappa of Arabian music. Writing for film scores, Wahab introduced Western instruments like electric guitar and piano to Arabian music. He also infected Egyptian rhythms with compatible Latin rhythms—cha chas and rumbas. There is a freedom ranging to outright wackiness in the

catchy songs.

Bringing together full-out brass (don't forget the tuba!) with cymbalon (Hungarian hammered dulcimer), Gypsy violin, and accordion, the picture is completed by Egyptian vocalist Dina Gouda, whose svelte stylings bring out the sway and sting of the music.

—By Lark Clark

The Creaking Tree String Quartet Sundogs (Independent)

Crossing stylistic boundaries combined with superb musicianship seems to be the twin poles around which this Toronto group revolve. Mixing bluegrass instrumentation with everything from jazz to avant-garde and chamber music, the quartet lets nothing hold back their exuberant sound. Andrew Collins (mandolin, mandola and mandocello), Brad Keller (guitar), Brian Kobayakawa (bass and cello banjo) and John Showman (violin) are terrific players but also communicate not only their love for their instruments but their enjoyment of the music they play to the listener.

Their four discs have been nominated for various Ju-

nos and their third disc, *The Soundtrack*, won two Folk Music Awards: one for Best Instrumentalists and one for Pushing The Boundaries. This new disc is already nominated for a pair of Junos and this reviewer sees nothing to stand in their way.

Their sense of fun is also conveyed in the playful titles they chose for their compositions, such as *Little Green Men*, *Last Payphone In Parkdale*, *Big 'Stache* and *The Drunken Detective*. The basic quartet sound is augmented this outing by occasional guests with drums, pedal steel and piano. My enjoyment of this disc is only

matched by an impatience to see and experience their magic live. More, more, more!

—By Barry Hammond

The Laws


Try Love (JML Music)

There's a contrary streak running inside many a music critic that when presented with performers who seem to be happily married, are tall, blonde and attractive, we want to find a flaw and not have them be talented as well.

Fortunately or unfortunately, where The Laws are concerned, we're out of luck with that assessment. This critic realized that long ago, seeing them at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival and reviewing an early CD, *Two*. Several years and four CDs later, it's even more obvious. Possessed of the kind of golden harmonies that the Everly Brothers had, this duo are also formidable songwriters and with the added musicianship and fine production supplied by their old friend, J.P. Cormier, this disc is likely to prove their most popular yet.


The title track has the potential to attract singles attention, as do several other songs on the disc: *I Believe in You*, *Walking Away*, *Rebel Cowboy Dream*, *Who's Keeping Score*; hell,





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there's hardly a track on the disc that doesn't have hit written on it. They're only likely to get bigger and bigger from here on, so you may as well jump on the ride now, and say you knew them when.

— By Barry Hammond

Krüger Brothers

Between the Lines (Double Time Music)

Forever and a Day (Double Time Music)

A musical friend from Ottawa was raving about the Krüger Brothers for a year before I finally had a good listen. Charlie's raving was justified: Jens Krüger is one of the best banjo players to come to my attention for a long time, and Uwe is equally impressive on acoustic guitar. To top it off, the brothers are originally from Switzerland, renowned for chocolate, neutrality and army knives, but not pickers.

Between the Lines is almost perfect. This album rescued me from a bleak, bone-chilling February afternoon in Edmonton. It's equally divided between their extremely melodic instrumentals (which, by the way, are far from bluegrass) and their

gentle brand of poetic folk music. The silences in *Sweet Nothing* stand out, a reminder that what you don't play is as important as the notes you do play.

Forever and a Day, their latest album, is entirely vocal tunes, mostly originals but also chestnuts like *Snowbird*. Although they cut loose at the end of *Appalachian Mist*, I would have liked to hear instrumentals on this disc as well. Then I would be raving.

— By Mike Sadava

Ruth Purves Smith and the 581

Out In The Storm (Independent)

Come hell or high water, Calgary's Ruth Purves Smith and the 581 brave the storm. Their 13-track collection begins on an optimistic note, *Shine Your Light*, a folksy acoustic serenade to hone your inner glow. *Here Comes That Train* sweetly steals a kiss at the station.

The 581 consist of Jim Kukko (guitar, vocals), Kathy Cook (mandolin, vocals), Brian Sovereign (bass), David Holloway (lead guitar) and Holly Mangus (drums). A bit too

gimmicky, *Godzilla* toys with the monster metaphor. *Out In The Storm* (Part 1) is catchy with its rock riffs and gang sing-alongs. *Out In The Storm* (Part 2) is the stronger of the two, less rally cry and more provocative, with Smith's voice at its strongest. For a debut album, *Out In The Storm* is a good effort. Give the band a few more rounds and they'll make a hit.

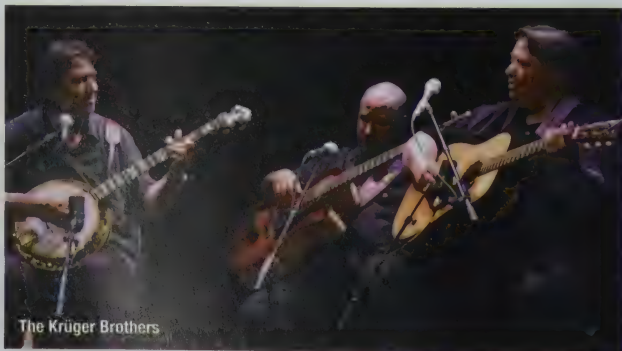
— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Jenny Allen

Blanket (Independent)

Jenny Allen has a soft voice you can wrap yourself up in. Naturally, the title of her album, *Blanket*, befits her approach to songwriting. She keeps it cosy and cuddly. Produced by John Ellis, *Blanket* is a coming-of-age album, about shedding old skin, letting go of who you've been and becoming who you are.

It's a pensive record, one that illustrates a girl's desire to grow into her own womanhood. *Beautiful Mess* explores themes of displacement, love and everything. Allen knows it's time to *Face The Mu-*



The Krüger Brothers

sic, even if it's *So Sad*. No use turning back wondering if you *Could Have Been Something*, it's time to embrace the now, what it is rather than what has been.

Allen summarizes it best in her folksy serenade *A Simple Word*, hands down the strongest track on the album. Her voice coos and portrays the ballsy woman she's become.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Pied Pear Joe Mock and Rick Scott

Collector's Edition 2011 (Independent)

OK, kids, here's a Canadian folk music history lesson. In the mid-'70s there was Pied Pumkin composed of Shari Ulrich, Joe Mock and Rick Scott. They were very good and prospered. Then Shari left to join The Hometown Band and so arose Pied Pear. Everybody flourished and made joyful noises in the tail end of the decade.

Fast forward to now: Joe Mock returns from France and Rick and he decide on one more tour for old time's sake. It's a success and to mark the moment, they leave behind this collection of Pied Pear tunes from two vinyl albums on one CD. It is a good thing when something that was unavailable for awhile becomes available again because, then as now, a good time was had by all. It's just back on the record now.

— by les siemieniuk

Donald Ray Johnson

It's Time (Mar Vista Records)

What a great surprise to find this Texas-born, big blues voice working out of Calgary, where's he's been hanging his fedora for many years. This release, his fifth, benefits from the fact that he's gotten to know simpatico players and, rarity-of-rarities, Johnson's also



Donald Ray Johnson

the band's main drummer (a singing drummer?).

Surrounded by a *Who's Who* list of Calgary first-call players such as Mike Clark (sax), Ron Casat (keys) and Russell Broom (guitar), together with Victoria's Bill Johnson, DRJ's vocals deliver the goods with a rich, Chicago sound that's steeped with soul. Dylan McDonald contributes killer harp on memorable tracks such as *Ain't No Fun To Me*, while the light Cajun stomp of *Louisiana Country Girl* leans on accordion for proper seasoning.

From the convincing conviction of *These Blues* to the outstandingly funky title track, Johnson remains the prime focus—the sign of a skilled vocalist. *Working Girl Blues* benefits from a similar funky feel, together with backup vocals (Chris Aries) and Bill Johnson's complimentary lead guitar. The funky, horn-fuelled *Watching You* depicts an uptempo Johnson in full control of his music, as Yuji Ihara turns in some scorching guitar. Another notable highlight is Johnson's run at Sam Cooke's *A Change Is Gonna Come*, revealing a confident singer. It's of little

funky roots go a long way to explaining his overall appeal as he eases into these blues and beyond.

It's time, all right—high time—we recognized this superbly talented artist. He's damned good, and so are the musicians he plays with here.

— By Eric Thom

Marcia Ball

Roadside Attraction (Allstate)

One day, Marcia Ball is bound to run out of steam—not on this album. The piano-pounding icon still shakes, rattles and rolls with the energy of a teenager as she conjures a party atmosphere with fellow players Colin Linden (guitar), Reese Wymans (B3), Mike Schermer (guitar) and longtime rhythm pals Don Bennett (bass) and Damien Llanes (drums). Add to this the fact that each of the 12 tracks are hers (including a co-write with producer Gary Nicholson and another with Dan Penn). Ball comes by her swamp boogie naturally, from endless road trips and ripping rooms apart to roll out the dance floor and it's only fitting that this album contains these hearty, road-tested originals.

From the lively, key-pop-pin' zydeco boogie of *We Fell Hard* to the slinky, satisfying



Marcia Ball

Reviews

groove of the Little Feat-esque title track, Ball proves to be the hostess with the mostest as she and Linden trade lick-age to a funky rhythm. One of the darker, most delicious songs is *I Heard It All*—the co-write with Nicholson—maximizing Linden's dirty slide as Ball paints a painful picture of broken love. Likewise, the personal, somewhat bittersweet *This Used To Be Paradise* is a highlight but, lest the vibe of the party be dragged down, the overall mood of this record is celebration—and Ball pulls this off in her sleep.

Try the hard-swinging *Sugar Boogie* with Thad Scott's notable sax, or the horn and piano-driven *The Party's Still Going On* and you'll realize she's far from kidding.

— By Eric Thom

Across The Borderline

Lie To Me (Independent)

Across The Borderline is a collaboration between an Austin, TX, singer/songwriter of Korean descent, BettySoo, and Vancouver resophonic slide guitar player Doug Cox.

The territory they explore on this disc is the work of songwriters they admire. The list is impressive and includes such heavyweights as Butch Hancock, Guy Clark, Blaze Foley, Doug Sahm, Loudon Wainwright III, and Jane Siberry but also some fine tracks by lesser known names and friends. The two have an easy and comfortable rapport and the disc has the feel of a porch or campfire session where singers trade songs they love.

Singers and players looking

for strong material could do a lot worse than checking out the gems on offer here. It's a nice performance, too, with guitars and voices blending in a strong mix from both artists. Stand-out tracks are the title song, *Big Cheeseburgers*, *Ain't Gonna Make You Mine*, and *Dublin Blues*. Cox has a knack for collaboration as he shows both here and on his other fine disc, 2007's *Slide To Freedom* with Salil Bhatt, Ramkumar Mishra, and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt. Another very pleasant outing.

— By Barry Hammond

John-Alex Mason

Jook Joint Thunderclap (Independent)

Dark, brooding and aptly titled, Mason has drifted from his solo, more acoustic self, ramping things up in the esteemed company of Lightnin' Malcolm,

Cedric and Cody Burnside as well as longtime harp player Gerry Hundt, together with the blending in of muscular percussive instruments (djembe, bolofon), mandolin and fiddle. From the swirling bee's nest of harp opening *My Old Lonesome Home*, Mason and company pulverize atop a pounding, repetitive rhythm, while *Gone So Long* continues the hill-country pulse, broken up by Cody's brief rap, which, as off-putting as that might sound, works.

More Than Wind sits back farther on the porch, revealing the quality of Mason's gruff vocals, embellishing them with the rootsy sounds of mandolin and fiddle. *Riding On* brings things back to the jook, yet the collision of multiple percussive instruments and accompanying harp and guitar is off-putting



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and, by the time Cody returns to rap, it feels sloppy.

All is redeemed with the slippery, slow, trance-like groove of *Rolled and Tumbled*, with its lazy guitars and lonesome harp, while *Diamond Rain* proves to be another disc highlight, slightly forlorn in its haunting hook. Mason's take on Fred McDowell's *Write Me A Few of Your Lines* moves uptempo, continuing the prominent rhythmic pulse, Mason's deep, soulful voice meshing with repetitive chords balanced against din-cutting solos. Things close off with the delightful, unadorned *Whisper*, featuring Mason's brooding vocal and acoustic guitar, like the mellow aftermath of a storm. Originals blend with covers seamlessly and, given Mason's ripe age of 36, the Devil has much to fear for the future.

— By Eric Thom

Leslie Alexander

Nobody's Baby (Independent)

Leslie Alexander continues to fulfil the high expectations we had for her after favourably reviewing her third disc, 2006's *Garden In The Stones*. John

MacArthur Ellis, once again at the record's helm as producer and multi-instrumentalist, does another fabulous job of bringing out the best in Alexander, both vocally and musically.

From rhythmic opening strumming of *Drive All Night* to the final warbling slide guitar notes of *Last Dance*, the disc compels, intrigues, surprises and satisfies. Alexander has a way with a lyric that makes her words both unexpected and inevitable—a rare gift for a songwriter—and the voice to tease, caress and wring out all



the potential of those lyrics.

Apart from the enjoyable popish hits like *Drive All Night* and *Crazy Train*, some of the disc's most intriguing moments are the childlike/Vietnam/skid row ambience of *Neon Blue*, the evocative lyric, "you're the hourglass's tool," in *Black Widow*, and the combination of the acronym for New Orleans, Louisiana, with the lyrics to Muddy Waters's *Baby Please Don't Go* and The Kinks' *Lola* in NOLA.

The session musicians are all excellent, including backing singers Jenny Allen (with whom she's currently touring) and Vancouver blues artist Taylor James. A damn fine disc.

— By Barry Hammond

Eddie Martin

Folk & Blues (Blueblood Records)

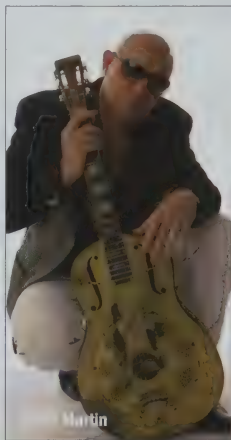
More of us should be aware of Eddie Martin's blues. He is recognized as one of the U.K.'s best, whether you prefer him solo and acoustic or loud and electric. He's a master of both worlds and his years of experience quickly separate him from legions of pretenders.

Also a survivor, Eddie's done it all and back again. Yet, at the heart of what he's accomplished, his claim to authenticity is beyond question. He is ruled by the music. An exceptional guitarist, he's also been gifted with a most expressive voice—a true 'blues' voice for those who appreciate Britain's sizeable contribution to the genre. Add to that his stand-alone harp skills and the ability to approximate a drum machine with his foot and you almost get the whole picture.

Yet Mr. Martin's ability to coin a phrase and build a song is what distinguishes him from many others. In fact, songs like the haunting *Kind Lady Moon* underline his abilities

as a storyteller, if not a rather theatrical mood-maker. This eerie, threatening track does a crack job of simulating his live abilities, inviting the listener in with emotive lyrics while completing the spell with his guitar mastery.

His greatest skill, however, is his slide-playing, served up in spades on *Let It Slide*. None of this can prepare you for the acoustic gem *Butterflies*, which Martin delivers as a jaw-dropping instrumental. His vocals are at their best on *Underwater Woman* while the pop-like *Month Of Mondays* incor-



porates the sort of hook he's built his career on—beautiful, complete with multi-tracked vocals.

Harp fans will savour the lethal workout on *Still Chasing That Fox* while the finger-picked feel of *Like A River* conjures images of Nick Drake if not Michael Chapman, vocally and otherwise. This is easily the most accessible, if not enjoyable of Eddie Martin's 11 CD releases. And as much as this writer has a soft spot for Martin's more electric/trio

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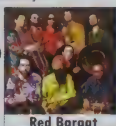
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self, this gentle reveal of his more sensitive side is a major accomplishment that deserves to open many, many new doors.

— By Eric Thom

Roisin White

With Thanks / Le buiochias (Veteran)

County Down's Roisin White is well known and highly respected in the world of traditional Irish singing. She is often cited as a tradition bearer, as well as a fine interpreter of traditional songs. Her style is direct and clear, which helps her excel at getting across the story of each song. She has a mature, warm voice, with a lilt that can become decidedly jaunty on the more uptempo material. This collection of fine material includes *Bold Jack Donohue* and *The Lakes of Pontchartrain* as well as some more unfamiliar material, all sung a cappella. Great songs, great singing. Plain and simple.

— By Tim Readman

Wheat and Water

Left Hand Blue (Cardboard Box Records)

Calgary's Wheat and Water's *Left Hand Blue* is an homage to an old house where the band and their friends passed the late nights and early hours away. A place and time where people gathered, shared food and sang their hearts out until the morning light.

With twangs of country and sad songs, Wheat and Water sound like the west. They tell tales of the land, old-fashioned ways and a time when the world didn't spin so quickly. Thematically it's simplicity they're about, life on the farm and the ties and binds of family.

Trainwreck is a bluesy duet, while *Old Jacket* celebrates familiarity. *Kiss Me Goodnight* is a soothing ode, though it's the album's closer *House of the Insane* that fondly recalls the conversation and good times of those nights you never want to end. Combine banjo, guitar, vox, harmonica, mandolin, bass, piano and drums and you've got a hodge podge of what happened beneath that one roof.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Ha Ha Tonka

Death of a Decade (Bloodshot Records)

From Missouri, home of Ha Ha Tonka State Park, comes a band that took the name as their own. *Death of a Decade* is their third release and a wonderful sonic bomb it is.

The four members sing like angels and play like devils with energy to burn. From the heart of the Ozarks they proudly deliver mandolin-driven rock fused with acoustic accoutrements, gospel energy, and literate lyrics with nice turns of phrases, such as this from *Made Example Of*: "If you don't change where you're going, you're gonna end up right where you're headed."

One of the highlights is the infectious and driving *Usual Suspects*, which opens the album. With its jangly guitars and mandolins, *Death of a Decade* is a lovely record to listen to and Ha Ha Tonka is a band to be reckoned with.

— by les siemieniuk

Matheu Watson

Matheu Watson (Independent)

Holy shit, this guy is hot (in the musical sense of the word)! Hot! A Scottish

multi-instrumentalist, composer and all-around renaissance guy, Matheu Watson has already played with a *Who's Who* of trad musicians, including Paddy Keenan, Fred Morrison and Salsa Celtica (among others). On this, his debut album, he plays mostly trad and self-composed tunes, aided and abetted by the likes of Martin Simpson (!), Kris Drever, Ali Hutton, Sean Óg Graham, Martin O'Neill and James Lindsay.

The sets of tunes range from the contemplative *Drying Out* to the sunny *Picnic* to the rocket-fuelled *Reunion*. It's all imaginatively arranged and trumpets the arrival of a stellar new talent. Hunt it down.

— By Richard Thornley

Levon Helm

Ramble at the Ryman (Levon Helm Studios)

There is a reason performers choose the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville as the venue for their live recordings. The acoustics, the history and the ghosts add a special something. Add one of the legendary voices of The Band and how could anything other than magic result? Levon Helm's *Ramble at the Ryman* delivers a mix of hits from The Band and some of Helm's solo offerings,

complete with a shining list of guest stars including Sheryl Crow, Buddy Miller, Sam Bush and John Hiatt.

Helm's battle with cancer has taken some of the power from his voice but the soulful delivery remains, as does his skill at the drum kit. There is a bit more polish on the instrumentation of this live performance than ever seemed to exist on the Band projects. Still, it's a pleasure to listen to these pros run through such beautifully crafted songs. Robbie Robertson's *The Weight* sounds as brilliant as ever. *Anna Lee* is as haunting as the Ryman itself and Helm's challenges in reaching the high notes only add to the tracks' sweetness.

— By Ruth Blakely

Victor Deme

Deli (Chapa Blues Records)

There isn't a speck of Africa that isn't musically rich, so you gotta wonder sometimes, how come we don't hear it? The answer to that lies in a tangled web of music biz economics, distribution, transportation, ad infinitum.

Good news, then, of a new recording studio and record label based in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, here-



tofore decidedly low profile. Enter Camille Louvel, a young Frenchman who fell in love with African music and decided to put down roots.

For several years, Camille's club, OuagaJungle, provided a venue for local artists to perform. Thursdays were for "sound systems", Friday was acoustic night, and Saturday night was reserved for established groups.

Following the demise of the club, Camille converted a house into a recording studio and kept four of the bedrooms for recording artists to stay in while working on their projects. His new label is called Chapa Blues

Records, which describes its sound as African roots. Chapa, or chapalo, is the local millet beer served in calabashes, an essential accompaniment to live music.

Louvel's first production has been a raging success. Victor Deme released his debut in France in 2008, becoming the top world music album of the year in that country, with very decent CD sales. On tour for the first time this summer, Deme performed in New York's Central Park concert series, opening for Jimmy Cliff, as well as appearing at the Montreal Jazz Festival.

After the success of the debut album, Deme has launched his second release, *Deli*. Deme's music is immediately inviting and danceable. His voice is mellow, alternately bluesy and soulful. The songs include Manding folksongs and a variety of rhythms, from soukous to morna, to some simple pop sounds and others made familiar to us from Malian music, great tunes with plenty of hooks and singalong choruses.

My only complaint is that at times the arrangements seem overcrowded, adding instruments without real grounding in the music. Combining guitar,



Reviews

congas, violins and organ took it over the top for me, the addition of harp to kora seemed liked an experiment that doesn't bear repetition, but when the next song featured clarinet, I longed for a return to a more straightforward production. Which did follow—thankfully.

As for Chapa Blues Records, following through this newly opened door is a slew of musicians from the local Burkina scene, eager for the chance to perform, as well as a jazz quartet from France, Yapa, making its musical pilgrimage "back home".

Founder Camille Louvel may be able to do for Burkina Faso what Ivan Duran in Belize has done for Garifuna music, or what the Cumbancha record label is doing for world music newcomers from around the globe. With meagre resources, Louvel is

focusing on what's right with Ougadougou—the wealth of energetic musical talent. —By Lark Clark

Duke Robillard

Passport to the Blues (Stony Plain)

The prolific Duke is a jack-of-all-blues. Pumping out 10 albums in as many years, he's as regular as the seasons, continually evolving his ever-expanding definition of the blues. The good news with *Passport* is that it's all-guitar-bent, swinging blues in the best tradition, and all but two songs are originals.

Beginning with the meaty, beaty, big and bouncy *Workin' Hard For My Uncle*, Robillard is clearly having a ball, backed by longtime cohort Doug James (saxes, harp), Bruce Bears (piano, organ),

Brad Hallen (bass) and Mark Teixeira (drums). T-Bird tough, it's followed by another new classic, *Hong Kong Suit*, with Baldry-like vocals, Little Feat-ready guitar and knee-poppin' rhythm. Robillard's vocals are sometimes over-the-top—you'll hear both highs and lows across these 13 tracks but, in conjunction with his deep-digging guitar lines, the one camouflages the other. Adding tour mate, Tom Waits-ish gravel to Waits's own *Make It Rain* works to his advantage.

Girl Let Me Tell You revisits the '50s—with great parts from Bears and James—and the hilarious *Fatal Heart Attack* goes uptown with a jazz feel. *Text Me* is a tune for the times, with a rock'n'roll drive. Yet, for the most part, songs like *Rhode Island Red Rooster* (with a nod

to the Wolf) and *Grey Sky Blues* (tipping a hat to Buddy Guy) demonstrate what's at the heart of the matter on *Passport*. It's a blues trip you'll enjoy taking, with the promise of making it a regular stop.

—By Eric Thom

Exene Cervenka

The Excitement of Maybe (Bloodshot)

Exene Cervenka, a.k.a. Christine Cervanka, former lead member and co-founder of the legendary Los Angeles punk rock band X, has released her sixth solo album, *The Excitement of Maybe*. In 2009 Exene was diagnosed with MS, but this singer/songwriter, artist and author is not slowing down. *The Excitement of Maybe* melds uplifting horn arrangements, soulful undertones of the Hammond organ and the bright guitar

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Left to Right - Top: Colleen Brown, Trevor Tchir, Lucas Chailson Bottom: Krystle Dos Santos

stylings of Dave Alvin with spine-chilling violin and mournful pedal steel arrangements for an enthralling and insightful look of love and love lost.

In short, *The Excitement of Maybe* is about the highs and lows of relationships. When love is new it is all-inspiring, as in the upbeat *Already in Love* or catchy *Falling*. But then, the questions and the doubts creep in as in *I Wish It Would Stop Raining*. And finally, the break-up, as reflected in the touching *Dirty Snow* or the peppy *Beyond You*. *The Excitement of Maybe* ends with *Love and Haight*, a poignant and eerily stirring song about never experiencing love again. *The Excitement of Maybe* is gutturally beautiful!

— By Phil Harries

Nuala Kennedy and Oliver Schroer

Enthralled (Borealis)

This album of original compositions by Irish flautist/composer Nuala Kennedy and Canadian fiddler/composer Oliver Schroer grew out of a musical relationship that began with teaching together at a Coast String Fiddle Camp on B.C.'s Sunshine Coast and blossomed into co-performing at Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow. Suitably inspired, they were driven to continue their collaboration until it bore fruit in the form of this release.

Sadly Oliver died due to the ravages of leukemia in 2008, and so this became the last recording he produced. What is striking about the music therein is how simple and how good it is. It possesses a hypnotic quality that draws the listener in and rewards repeated listening.

Stylistically, it belongs to no particular tradition but embraces many, and is all at once both unique and comfort-



ingly familiar. Quintessentially melodic, it evokes a strong and vibrant image of two players truly captivated by each other's mesmeric melodies. *Enthralled*: an apt title indeed.

— By Tim Readman

Blackie and the Rodeo Kings

Kings and Queens (FUM/Dramatico/Universal)

Blackie and the Rodeo Kings' *Kings and Queens* is a gourmet meal made up of some of the tastiest ingredients in roots music. In addition to BARK's Colin Linden, Stephen Fearing and Tom Wilson, the guests are some of the best female voices recording today. Emmylou Harris brings her distinctive flavour to *Step Away*, my vote for the best track of the 14-song CD. The combination of tasty guitar and Patti Scialfa bring some much needed spice to *Shelter Me, Lord*. From Roseanne Cash to Lucinda Williams, the vocalists all do their part, but the number of ballads may leave you pushing away from the table before the meal is over.

Three years in the making, *Kings and Queens* is a lazy day

CD that deserves to be listened to without distractions. It's just a dash of salt away from being truly great.

— By Ruth Blakely

Martyn Joseph

Under Lemonade Skies (Pipe Records)

Here are a few words you'll find in most media coverage of this Welshman's music: conviction, evangelical, fiery, angst, passion and commitment. He is often described as an acoustic Bruce Springsteen, too, although he can only dream of the kind of record sales experi-

enced by the Boss. The key to really understanding Mr. Joseph is to see his live show.

It rapidly becomes clear that he takes his work, but never himself, seriously. His writing, playing and singing has all of the qualities outlined above but his performances are underpinned by a self-deprecating and ironic humour that is both charming and endearing.

The 10 songs on offer here represent his most accessible work to date, with great hooks and a keen pop sensibility skillfully woven through his lyrical



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Reviews

messages from the heart, the soul and the spirit. This is a great collection of songs from a really talented guy operating at the top of his game. Bydew 'n ddigon Martyn, 'n fawr stffia!
— By Tim Readman

Michael Chapman

Fully Qualified Survivor (Light in the Attic Records)

This is a re-issue of an album which is considered by many to be a lost treasure. Chapman originally recorded this for the stoner-centric Harvest label in 1970. It features soon-to-be David Bowie guitarist Mick Ronson and was produced by the soon-to-be-famous Elton John producer Gus Dudgeon. Chapman's peer group of maverick troubadours included John Martyn, Roy Harper, Bert Jansch and Kevin Ayers—all one-of-a-kind performers. His mix of jazz and folk styles, songs with simple words and abstract meanings, and engaging acoustic rock guitar workouts creates an album full of surprises. It's like a tech-

nicolour postcard from the past. Have a listen and be transported back to a magical era when the British music scene was awash with players who blurred the edges between genres and came up with music that was both original and lasting.

Postscript: Michael Chapman remixed a seven-inch single release for my band in 1983. I visited him a few times in those days. I just found out from the sleeve notes he still lives in that wee cottage in Northumbria. I think it's time for a visit. I want to tell him I found his treasure.
— By Tim Readman

Phyllis Sinclair

Washerwoman's Lament (Independent)

Alberta singer/songwriter Phyllis Sinclair is starting to make some ripples in the music industry. Her latest offering, *Washerwoman's Lament*, should help boost her profile. The production leans to simple, befitting the material and Sinclair's vocals. *Another Single Day* is a beautifully crafted song that should ring true

to many single parent families. *Our Side of the Line* is a straight-ahead country tune that puts most of what is coming out of Nashville to shame. Sinclair doesn't hit every song out of the park but *Washerwoman's Lament* should make listeners look forward to what comes next.

— By Ruth Blakely

Andrew Cole

Why We Wonder (Crier/Fountain North)

Andrew Cole is blessed with one of those voices that Tom Cochrane—who helped get the record produced by his producer, Bill Bell, after hearing a demo, and who duets on the disc with Cole—said is the kind of voice "other singers would die for". This is the debut disc from this Toronto-born singer, who grew up in the U.K. (Liverpool, Wales and Manchester), as well as Las Vegas and Florida. His voice won him the 2002 Stars In Your Eyes musical competition in the U.K. but it wasn't until 2004, after the death of his father, that Cole seriously started writing songs and working on his own personal music.

The disc also features a couple of duets with Kathleen Edwards and the contributions of Canadian session stalwarts like Kevin Bright (Cole's website says he's the guitar player who plays for Norah Jones, though inexplicably spells his name as seen previously, instead of Breit). It is a pretty fine voice—to this critic it's reminiscent of





someone like 1980s pop sensation Paul Young at his best.

The first cut on the disc even reminds this listener of *Every Time You Go Away*, Young's cover of the Hall and Oates hit. The lyric writing is serviceable, if a bit popish, but it is an extremely listenable disc, well-produced and seemingly radio friendly. It should be a good launching vehicle for the young singer to boost himself into the rarefied atmosphere of stardom, if anything can.

— By Barry Hammond

Ryan's Fancy

What a Time! A Forty Year Celebration
(Singsong Inc.)

What a Time! is the musical legacy of Fergus O'Byrne, Denis Ryan, and the late Dermot O'Reilly; three Irish emigrants who came to St. John's with a repertoire of Irish ballads and singalongs. Before long they had added Newfoundland material ... and made it popular all over again with the locals. There are favourites such as *Feller From Fortune* and *The Ryans and the Pittmans*, as well as Irish classics such as *Rocky Road to Dublin* and *The Parting Glass*.

There's nothing fancy about these lads—their music is in much the same vein as The Clancy Brothers and The Dubliners. It is the foundation upon which contemporary Newfoundland bands like Great Big Sea were built. You can tell they are really enjoying themselves, and are hell-bent on entertaining whoever is listening. This will make you smile, laugh and have you dancing around the kitchen.

— By Tim Readman

Suzie Vinnick

Me'n' Mabel (Independent)

It's good for an album to have a hook and *Mabel* is Suzie's *Lucille*, given that this is her bona fide blues release. To that end, she's surrounded herself with solid players in the ever-amazing Tony D, Rick Fines, Roly Platt and Chris Whiteley. For her part, Vinnick can sing whatever she puts her mind to—and nails it. She has a beautiful voice. Yet, for some reason, her blues personality can be divided into two characters. She plays it straight, rolling with her natural instincts, or she takes on an exaggerated persona that can—in the context of the blues—sound

somewhat less sincere.

To her credit, her guitar playing throughout *Me'n' Mabel* is sensational, especially in light of the competition. *Quit Your Lowdown Ways* would be an example of true Suzie—the guitar playing is exemplary while her vocals are perfect for the song, pulled from heart and soul. Likewise, *Queen Bee* marries her newfound guitar skills with a gutsy, believable vocal performance. The second Suzie goes into character as a breathy exaggeration of a blues singer, projecting a fey innocence, if not cuteness, which takes away from the authenticity she might rightfully claim. Examples of this include *Oreo Cookie Blues* or Willie Dixon's *You'll Be Mine*. In both she takes on a caricature of a blues singer, altering her range or pushing her vocals in an inauthentic way.

The former is a piece she's been performing live for some time while the latter, boasting some wonderful guitar from Tony D, is just not what she does best. The good news is that there are enough wonderful performances to offset the others. The heartfelt *Sometimes I Think I Can Fly* is, alone, worth the price of the album while her jazzy *Oh My* is another lovely

study of her abilities, aided by Chris Whiteley's muted horn. All in all, a somewhat surprising step for such a gifted singer whose voice can often define the song rather than the other way around.

— By Eric Thom

Si Kahn

Courage (Strictly Country Records)

Si Kahn is often mentioned in the same breath as Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. His work with the non-profit group Grassroots Leadership has helped people get involved in grassroots politics and take a stand on social justice issues. In short, he has an unimpeachable record as an organizer and activist.

When it comes to his work as a songwriter, he has written many pro-worker songs—some of which have grown into classic labour anthems. Chances are there are at least a couple in here, too. I love and cherish the sentiments expressed in this collection of Kahn originals.

I am not so fond of the music and singing, however. His voice tells the story well enough but doesn't always hold the melody as sweetly as it might. The backing is all competently played but has no spark of originality to set the material alight. Unfortunately, content fails to triumph over form.

— By Tim Readman

The North Shore Celtic Ensemble

Flywheel (Independent)

Another fine recording from these youngsters from Vancouver's North Shore. Under the watchful eye and discerning ear of musical mentors Claude Giguère and Jay Knutson, they have developed a captivating sound, incorporating Celtic, French-Canadian, oldtime and original tunes and songs. There



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are splendid versions of Jennie Bice's *Ignitions*, Serge Fiori's *Dixie* and John McCusker's *Frank's Reel*, all played by various combinations of 20-plus fiddlers backed by piano, bass, percussion, guitars, etc. The result is youthful, exuberant and energetic, as well as being remarkably engaging. Great stuff!

— By Tim Readman

The Blue Shadows

On the Floor of Heaven (Bumstead Prod.)

(CD)

This deluxe, remastered two-disc edition of the original 1993 album—with outtakes, unreleased and live tracks—is a welcome blast from the past. The Blue Shadows were Billy Cowsill, late of the late '60s and early '70s bubblegum band The Cowsills and later still The Co-Dependents, teamed with Jeffrey Hatcher, a Canadian roots-rocker who had a 1980s cult success with Jeffrey Hatcher and the Big Beat. Before his death in Calgary in February 2006, Cowsill told a writer from the also-deceased *No Depression* magazine that this was the finest work he'd ever produced.

This re-release, in a much better form, of a long out-of-print disc proves him correct. A gorgeous mix of roots-rock/alt-country with gorgeous pop harmonies reminiscent of The Everly Brothers or The Beatles sounds even fresher today than when it was released now that other groups, such as The Jayhawks, Gary Louris, or The Old 97s, have popularized the sound that was either too retro or too modern, depending on which U.S. record executive it was presented to at the time.

If you love that style, this is a priceless gem of a record with some great songwriting as well. Accompanying

musicians include the likes of Greg Leisz, Gary Comeau and Barry Muir, who have their own histories in Canadian popular music. Classic stuff.

— By Barry Hammond

Luisa Maita

Maita Remixed (Cumbancha)

Luisa Maita's background makes her appearance on the international stage a natural development, from a gregarious father who attracted musician friends to hang around and play, to an uncle with a record label and another who invited her to sing with his band.

Signal successes such as having one of her songs named Song of the Year by *Rolling Stone Brazil* magazine, or being featured vocalist in the promo video used in Rio's successful bid for the 2016 Olympics, meant that she was ready when a hand-to-hand connection to Jacob Edgar landed her on his Cumbancha record label.

The resulting album, *Lero-Lero*, was a delicious discovery. Breezy, sexy, hail the continuation of the line of jazzy female Brazilian singers! What DJ/remixer wouldn't want to jump into that warm pool of goodness? Seven well-established producers from Brazil, the U.K. and the U.S. punch it up, break it down, dip it in deep reverb, and turn out intriguing smooches of the originals.

One good thing about the album, which is essentially an EP, is getting to hear the infectious title track three times out of the seven tracks. It's a testimony to the original that you still like it at the end of the listen through.

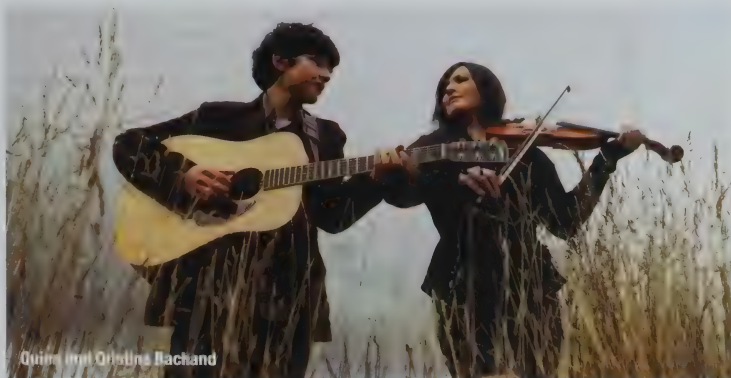
Buy the original first.

— By Lark Clark

Arlene Bishop

Begin Again (Independent)

Reviews



Quinn and Kristina Bachand

Clean acoustic guitar and distinctive vocals are the first things you might notice when you pop *Begin Again* into your player. Taking the time to endurable pushes the listener to focus on the songs. The title track feels comfortable and familiar, a sort of cross between Eliza Gilkyson and Shawn Colvin. Bishop's unique phrasing tells the tale in *Ring of Truth*, which may be the most commercial offering here. *If There's a God* continues the heartbreak theme that runs throughout the project. The music is so honest you may feel a bit of a voyeur listening to some of the tracks but it's worth any vague uneasiness you may encounter.

— By Ruth Blakely

Ron Sexsmith

Long Player Late Bloomer (WEA)

Bob Rock produced this album. Yes, that Bob Rock! He of Metallica, Aerosmith and Mötley Crew notoriety. Crooner Michael Bublé made the introduction, apparently. Imagine Ron Sexsmith in spandex. Hmm ... no, not really. Long venerated by the likes of Elton John, Rod Stewart, Elvis Costello and Emmylou Harris, Sexsmith remains by and large a cult figure rather than a major celebrity—status his immense

talents truly deserve. It's doubtful *Long Player, Late Bloomer* will make that transition despite its numerous endearing qualities. There's nothing radical here that directs an iron fist towards the solar plexus. Then again, that's never been his way.

Like most of his previous recordings, this latest effort is consistently good from start to finish—full of the usual astute, pithy lyrics and discerning melodies sung with that attractive, minimalist, moody McCartney-esque vocal delivery. Despite the overall lightness and pervasive pop sensibility that filters through this record, there's a darkness here, too, that creeps in on such tracks as *Michael and His Dad* ("*Mother's gone away to the*

land of safe keeping / *Michael walking from the grave* / *Says, 'Dad, she's only sleeping'*") and *Get In Line* ("*If you're bent on bringing me back down / Better get in line*"). Gentle and unsparing, *Long Player, Late Bloomer* simply reiterates Ron Sexsmith's choice credentials.

— By Roddy Campbell

Kristina & Quinn Bachand

Family (Independent)

Just in case you haven't heard, 20-year-old Kristina Bachand and her 14-year-old brother, Quinn, are the most exciting act to come along in the world of Celtic music since ... well, since anyone you care to mention. To give an idea of their sound, they do bear some

similarities to Liz Carroll and John Doyle at their very best. They also incorporate old-time, bluegrass and swing into their predominantly Celtic repertoire. Kristina has recently begun to add vocals to their sound and is already making huge strides as a singer. It is perhaps guitar maestro Quinn who has captured the imagination of listeners most, with his incredible natural flair and effortless playing. He is already in demand as a sideman and has captured the accompanist spot with Ashley MacIsaac, who has called him the most musical guitarist he has ever worked with. Kristina is never overshadowed though, and her fiddling is spirited and compelling, on both uptempo numbers and slower ballads and airs.

This collection features mainly Irish traditional tunes as well as some Jerry Holland originals and a couple of songs. It is produced by another of Victoria, BC's fine young musicians, Adrian Dolan, and the sound positively sparkles throughout. So if you haven't heard them yet, then hear this. Not to be missed!

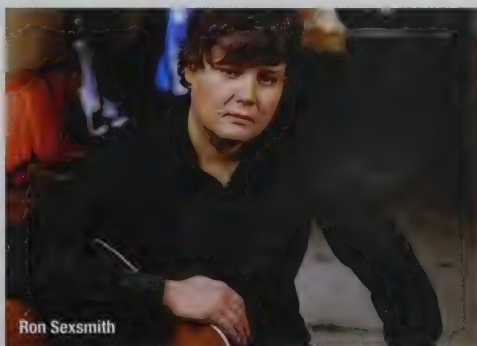
— By Tim Readman

Felonious Bosch

Toybox (Omnium Records)

This is an entertaining CD from this Minneapolis-Saint Paul six-piece. All sorts of names like Gryphon and Third Earband have been banded about in an attempt to reference their so-called psychedelic folk-rock. I am going to slot them into the prog Rock pigeonhole, on the grounds that they most resemble the mighty Gentle Giant, in both instrumentation and delivery.

There's a medieval flavour to the material but there's a firm rock edge there, too. Like GG, they play scads of instruments



Ron Sexsmith

Reviews

between them, including all the rock 'n' roll staples, plus dulcimers, flutes, fiddles, saxophones and recorders. They also have an off-kilter sense of humour as evidenced by the wacky lyrics and odd ball arrangements. Refreshingly nutty! Try some.

— By Tim Readman

Coyote Grace

Ear to the Ground (Independent)

Glancing at the back cover of Coyote Grace's disc, Joe Stevens and Ingrid Elizabeth make a gorgeous young California couple. But there is a difference—Stevens is a transsexual who became a man six years ago, while Elizabeth is a well-known lesbian activist.

In no way have gender identity challenges and sexual politics prevented them from

recording a beautiful, poignant album of acoustic Americana music. A sex change has left Stevens with a voice in the Paul Simon range, while Elizabeth sings with a bit of a twang. Together, backed by some tasteful, subtle musical friends, they make a powerful duo.

Most of the well-crafted songs deal with universal themes of love, regret, and getting Daddy's truck and skipping school. But they don't ignore their unique lives. In *Picture Frame*, Elizabeth sings of the sadness of watching her baby girl die, to be reborn as a man child. And in *Girls Like Me*, she sings: "Thank God that boys like her like girls like me." No matter what your gender identity, there's much to like on this disc.

— By Mike Sadava

Barbara Dickson

Words Unspoken (Greentree)

Ms. Dickson made quite a splash on the Scottish folk scene during the 1960s and '70s. She then went on to have a number of hit pop singles and albums. That was when it all began to get a bit middle of the road for my taste, and in spite of the presence of a few traditional songs sung in her Dunfermline brogue, it remains so now. There are a couple of glimpses of what could have been, such as the sprightly reading of *Ythanside* with tasteful whistle, guitar and bodhran parts. Sadly though, these are few and far between. In the right hands, in the right setting, with the right songs, this could have been great. Unfortunately *Words Unspoken* is mostly rather

er smothered by over-produced sound, and so the pudding becomes over-egged. Look that up in the dictionary and it says "to spoil something by trying too hard to improve it".

— By Tim Readman

James Findlay

Sport and Play (Fallside Recordings)

James Findlay is a 20-year-old singer, guitarist and fiddle player from the county of Dorset in England's southwest. He first came to the attention of folk music lovers a couple of years back as a winner of the BBC Young Folk Award. Since then he has garnered many good reviews and gained a following as a result of his vibrant work as a live performer. This is a strong collection of traditional songs that features his many strengths as both an instrumen-

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Reviews

talist and singer. The centerpiece is an unaccompanied nine-minute rendition of *Tam Lin*. It strongly reminded me of Peter Morton's version in terms of the raw passion of the delivery.

Now *Tam Lin* has been recorded many times, and even though his version is great, there is perhaps a case for a more adventurous selection of material next time around—especially when you consider this CD also contains chestnuts such as *Sorry the Day I Was Married*, *Dives and Lazarus*, *The White Cockade* and *Lakes of Shilin*. Meanwhile though, this is a very strong and confident debut from a bright new talent.

— By Tim Readman

Jonathan Scales

Plot/Scheme (Independent)

Most people probably still tend to associate steel drums with large ensembles from the Caribbean but solo performers have been especially innovative in their use of the instrument. To the names of such trailblazers as Victor Brady, Othello Molineaux (with Jaco Pastorius's band), Andy Narell and his brother Jeff, one can now add Jonathan Scales.

With the help of a range of guest musicians, Scales, who is based in Asheville, NC, offers mostly original jazz compositions on his second album. *Baghdad Bomb Rock* effectively integrates news snippets about the war in Iraq into the composition. *Yep* is one of two tracks featuring Jeff Coffin of The Flecktones on sax. *Osmosis*, a bonus track, also makes creative use of both spoken word and hand-clapping percussion. Scales is an artist to keep an eye on.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau



Jonathan Scales

Kathy Kallick Band

Between the Hollow and the High-Rise (Live Oak Records)

Since 1975 Kathy Kallick has proved that bluegrass can be played in the traditional Monroe style without the necessity of being a God-fearin', Republican-votin', rodent-eatin' varmint.

Over the years this Grammy-winning singer and songwriter from northern California has played and recorded with many of the top names in bluegrass, bringing an urban feel to this genre.

Kallick's latest album could attract some new listeners to bluegrass. As usual she has a hot band, with special mention going to the spectacular Dobro playing of Greg Booth.

The songs, a combination of originals and traditionals, are also powerful. My favourite is her take on the *White House Blues*, which was originally written about McKinley and Roosevelt and now looks back on the horrors of the Bush years. "*Obama's in the White House, doing his best. Bush is back in Texas, taking his rest. He'll be gone a long time.*"

Amen to that.

— By Mike Sadava

Findlay Napier

Out All Night (BRM/Karmic)

Two of Scotland's finest young traditional musicians, Findlay Napier and Gillian Frame, team up with keyboardist Douglas Miller and percussionist Paul Jennings to perform

a set made up almost entirely of original songs, written by Napier and Nick Turner. The influence of their trad musical foundation is evident throughout, but there is an equally strong contemporary feel in the musical settings given to the songs. The lyrics pull the listener along on a journey during which all sorts of colourful characters emerge: the drunken fighter on *George*, the stupidly jealous roommate on *He's Such a Sweetie*, the elderly dancer of *Irina's Waltz*; all introduced and described in alluring detail in Napier's fetching Scots brogue.

It's as if someone took a bit of the Proclaimers, some Elvis Costello, a pinch of Highland fiddle music and some funky rhythms, blended them all together and washed it down with a goodly shot of single malt scotch.

— By Tim Readman

Joey Only Outlaw Band

Transgression Trail (Independent)

Taking a cue from artists like Joe Strummer and Billy Bragg, Joey Only is a Trenton, ON, punk rocker turned political activist turned bad ass country folk-rock singer. There are echoes on this disc of every-



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Reviews

thing from Bob Dylan to Corb Lund, from Stompin' Tom Connors to Waylon Jennings to polka-klezmer bands doing Johnny Cash's version of Geoff Mack's *I've Been Everywhere*. Deliberately hard-headed and relentlessly authentic you might question Joey Only's ability to learn life lessons but you can't question his ability to make music.

This disc is surprisingly good both lyrically and musically. He tells it like he sees it. It's drinkin'/smokin'/hard-livin' protest music made by a guy that's actually done most of the things he sings about. When he sings about "huggin' the toilet instead of his wife," or his "daddy being a drunk and a jerk," you know it's probably true. If he can survive his own legend and make progress musically, he could have the makings of a classic. Time will tell.

— By Barry Hammond

Ben Prestage

Live at Pineapple Willy's (Independent)

Ben Prestage holds the unusual honour of being the only two-time recipient of the Lyons/Pitchford Award for Best Diddley Bow Player at the International Blues Challenge. Prestage grew up in a nameless place in the swamps of south-central Florida and ended up being a one-man band who plays his drum kit by means of four foot pedals manipulated by his toes and heels. Among his instruments is a nine-string lap guitar and a special cigarbox guitar that allows him to play both guitar and bass simultaneously.

Unfortunately, it's not clear exactly which of his instruments he plays on this

27-track, two-CD live album (his fifth release) because information, including song-writing credits, is practically non-existent. The repertoire includes some well-known songs such as *Step It Up and Go*, *Are You From Dixie*, and *Can't Be Satisfied*, as well as others that are presumably originals. Prestage is a compelling performer and this album, although inconsistent in quality, should appeal to fans of one-man bands who play down and dirty blues.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau

Leeann Atherton

Heart Traveled Road (Independent)

The Austin-based singer Leeann Atherton has always been a solid artist but this time she has outdone herself. *Heart Traveled Road*, her fifth album, is one of those albums that has it all in spades. Atherton tackles a wide range of styles, including blues, country, Tex-Mex and rock 'n' roll, and is a master at all of them, as well as being a very fine songwriter.

The production by Rich Brotherton is exquisite and the musicians are also up to the task. *Remember Me* is classic torch material while *Change of Heart* is a quintessential soul song. Anyone with a keen interest in American roots music needs this album.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau

Jo Serrapere

Love Going South (The Detroit Radio Co.)

In spite of the fact that Jo Serrapere was one of the two founding members of the old-time string band Uncle Earl (although she quit before the all-female group got signed to Rounder), her first two solo albums

didn't garner the attention they deserved. *Love Going South* may not change that pattern but that's only because we live in an unfair world.

Her previous album, *Tonight at Johnny's Speakeasy* (2003), was a blues gem. The musical styles demonstrated on her new album aren't quite as easy to pin down but the album is equally impressive in its own way. Serrapere is a fabulous singer and no slouch in the songwriting department either. *Unbreak My Heart* and *Cry Your Eyes* are country songs that drip with aching beauty while the title song starts out as a slow blues and builds in intensity. The band fits her vocals like a fine pair of kid gloves.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau

Kev Corbett

Son of a Rudderless Boat (Little Red Canon)

Kev Corbett, with his 10-track debut release *Son of a Rudderless Boat*, has taken a beautiful snapshot of the Canadian landscape. This native Nova Scotian's voice is like no one else. He is all Canadian, with hints of Cockburn, Cohen and Lightfoot in his voice. Corbett weaves through well-crafted

and skilfully written songs about everything from love to fallen idols to roadside adventures.

Primarily an acoustic release, Corbett's dazzling guitar playing complements his unique perspective on life. *Son of a Rudderless Boat* has it all, from the quirky, as in the humorous foot tappin' *Cheese and Whiskey*, to the introspective of *Uncle*, a stirring honest observation of a bigot uncle.

Corbett is a true folksinger and *Son of a Rudderless Boat* is filled with passionate commentaries, and none more spirited than *Skull and Bones*, a story about civic corruption and unscrupulous do-gooders. *Son of a Rudderless Boat* is a marvellous listen.

— By Phil Harries

Rob Ickes

Road Song (Reso Revolution)

Every once in awhile a musical visionary comes along and opens up new possibilities for his chosen instrument. For his fifth album, but first release on his own label, Rob Ickes does just that. The 10-time winner of the International Bluegrass Music Association's Dobro Player



of the Year Award joined up with Michael Alvey, an elementary school music teacher who just happens to be a fabulous jazz pianist.

Ickes and Alvey interpret jazz standards, including two by Wes Montgomery, namely *West Coast Blues* and the title track, two associated with Duke Ellington (*Caravan* and Billy Strayhorn's *Take the "A" Train*), and Oscar Peterson's *Hymn to Freedom*. Robinella provides vocals on three tracks, including Hoagy Carmichael's *The Nearness of You* and Hank Williams's *You Win Again*.

The musicians leave plenty of room for improvisation but the strong melodies still shine through. *Road Song* is a sparkling and innovative way to launch a new label.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau

The Beauties

The Beauties (Six Shooter Records)

Great harmonies, brilliant songs and bright guitar licks, The Beauties, a Toronto-based roots band, has it all with their self-titled debut album.

With Darin McConnell and Shawn Creamer on guitars and vocals, lead guitar by Jud Ruhl and Paul Pfisterer, and Derek Downham minding the rhythm section, they groove through roots, blues and R&B splendidly. The opening selection, *Fashion Blues*, is smart and

witty, reminiscent of the Velvet Underground. The Beauties take a quick stop in the British '60s blues with *Devil Do* and then pump it up with a jump-blues style *Tired Fired Blues*. The Beauties are a fun and refreshing Canadian band.

— By Phil Harries

Elvyn

The Decline (Little Wagon Music)

Canadian band Elvyn, with Ryan Beerman (vocals, guitar), Joel Beerman (vocals, drums), Jason O'Reilly (bass) and Jeremy Knibbs (guitar), have recently released their second full-length album, *The Decline*.

Fresh harmonies, fantastic melodies and great rhythms—everything you expect from a power pop band with a rootsy guitar and folk-country sound. *The Decline* begins with the poppy *Those Were the Days*, then Elvyn eases into its country-folk comfort zone with skill via such delights as *Nature of Your Game*, then shifts back to the pop sound with the title track, *The Decline*, and *I Was There*. A very good listen.

— By Phil Harries

The Leisure Society

Sleeper (Full Time Hobby)

Some records are seasonal. The Leisure Society has listeners longing for winter, a warm blanket and a pot of tea. Their drowsy melodies echo bands





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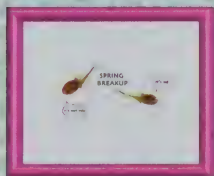
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Reviews

like Fleet Foxes and Grizzly Bear.

With beautiful melodies and the universality of being human, The Leisure Society boasts building harmonies, sweeping instrumentation and flute.

Title track, *The Sleeper*, conjures up a sense of loneliness and isolation while offering up a sense of belonging in song. As an English band, The Leisure Society tackles the pipe dream of running off to America in *The Last of the Melting Snow* with grace and simplicity. With rich instrumentation and splashes of Fleet Foxes finger picking, *We Were Wasted* moves through a night on the town to the flat above the square.

The twinkling instrumentation perfectly juxtaposes the bleak lyrical subject matter of *The Darkest Place I Know*, a coming-of-age tale of internal monsters and society's naysayers.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Spring Break Up

It's Not You, It's Me (Label Fantastic!)

What's more apt than pairing Yukon-based songwriter Kim Barlow and Newfoundland-based Mathias Kom (The Burning Hell) for a break-up themed album? The two work in polarities—their contrast may be geographical but their varied interpretation of their heart-break is universal.

This is a record for the lonely hearts clubs, with anthems such as *It's Not Me, It's You, I'm Sorry That I Tried To Punch You in the Face*, and *You Don't Need A Heart*. Instead of pop music's typical take on the syrupy hyperbole of love, this is for those who have loved and

lived to tell it all: love sucks. At least the murky aftermath with all of its bleeding-heart poetry and heaviness. *Spring Break Up* is a fantastic project by two of Canada's finest musicians—think the Moldy Peaches but better.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Jeana Leslie & Siobhan Miller

Shadows Tall (Greentrax Recordings)

This is the second release from the winners of BBC Radio 2's Young Folk Award for 2008. They have a highly orchestrated approach to their music, with detailed arrangements and precise playing being a main feature. This gives the music a somewhat constrained feel and robs it of room to breathe. It's a shame because they both sing well and have some good musical ideas. I think they'd benefit from a skilled producer who could encourage them to adopt a more spontaneous, free-sounding approach.

— By Tim Readman

Brock Zeman

Ya Ain't Crazy Henny Penny (Mud Music #2)

Ya Ain't Crazy Henny Penny, Brock Zeman's eighth release, started as a Christmas present for his friends. It has an intimate feel to it, mostly acoustic (either guitar or piano) with just some electric guitar, drums and bass to fill out the sound. It sounds like he's singing right to the listener and that's its strength, apart from the triple-punch of the Carleton Place, ON, native's strong songwriting, lived-in voice, and deft picking. Some of the best songs, in an admittedly damn good batch, are *Where You Leave*

Your Car, A Song To A Girl, and *Percy's Daughter*. Critics are always wondering why certain singer/songwriters aren't bigger than they are; Zeman is definitely one to fit in that category, since he easily seems as capable as anyone currently making music in Canada. Check this guy out.

— By Barry Hammond

Kevin Brown

The Country Primaries (Independent)

If you haven't been to the Columbia River basin in eastern Washington State, just imagine Kamloops on steroids. It's big, rolling, dry, sagebrush country, beautiful but desolate.

But there's nothing desolate about Kevin Brown's debut album. Brown is known in the Pacific Northwest as a bluegrass mandolinist, but he has finally got the chance to show his great songwriting chops.

With a raspy but friendly voice that reminds me a bit of Jerry Jeff Walker, he brings the harsh landscape and its charac-

ters to life. There's the farmer dealing with drought who's "out standing in his field." The fisherman who hooks a rainbow and realizes he has "a little heaven on the line." The pretty young teacher standing by the overheated school bus "with all her chicks in a row." Maybe it's my age, but my favourite is a simple love song, *It Was You*, about long-lasting love and waking up to find "the moon was in your salt and pepper hair."

The combination of Brown's songwriting and the organic production of Ivan Rosenburg, whose Dobro work is all over the disc, has resulted in a real gem from this dusty country.

— By Mike Sadava

Shannon McNally

Western Ballad (Sacred Sumac)

Quickly on the heels of her highly acclaimed 2010 *Coldwater* release, Shannon McNally, has followed up with a stellar collection of Americana inspired by her interpretation of the classic Ginsberg poem *Western Ballad*.

With producer and longtime collaborator Mark Bingham, McNally, has put together an excellent mixed bag of alt-country, from the classic western of the title track to the more traditional country, *True Possession*. *Western Ballad* begins with an upbeat indie, *My Ghost Memory*, and skillfully and wistfully meanders to the final, *In My Own Second Line* — an introspective look at herself.

McNally's naturally husky vocals fused with well-crafted and dreamlike instrumentation make for a memorable and evocative experience. *Western Ballad* is a miscellany of heartache and pain that begs to be listened to over and over.

— By Phil Harries



Shannon McNally

Kim Stockwood

Back to the Water (Independent)

Newfoundland's Kim Stockwood is best known for her breakthrough hit *Jerk*, and as a member of Shaye. She has returned to her homeland for this release, which features some of the island's best-loved songs, including *Ode To Newfoundland* and *Squid Jiggin' Ground*.

There are also two Ron Hynes songs, *St. John's Waltz* and *Atlantic Blue*. She enlists the help of The Dardanelles on *Feller from Fortune* and The Once on Now I'm 64. That all sounds quite promising, but there's no sense here that she really connects with this material, irrespective of what the sleeve notes say. Unfortunately, the only real 'Rock' in evidence here is the soft kind. It will probably get a lot of airplay on mainstream radio but it won't be getting any in my house. It's too smooth for words.

— By Tim Readman

Mabon

Live at the Grand Pavilion (Easy on the Records)

Mabon are a Welsh instrumental Celtic funk band featuring a fleet-fingered front-line trio of accordion, fiddle and flute/pipes. They are backed by a rhythm section of guitar, bass and drums. They are a very well-drilled, tight unit who can all play extremely well. Their repertoire includes some trad tunes but the majority are originals, written by Jamie Smith.

If you are wowed by musical virtuosity then these guys will knock your socks off, even if you are wearing two pairs. Unfortunately there's not much else to say about the music, because no matter how well executed, it is one-dimensional. Also included is a DVD of the band live on the Isle of Wight. They all play really well on the telly, too, but there's not much more to be gained from them, in terms of personality, from the addition of the visuals.

— By Tim Readman



Kim Stockwood

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Dáimh

Diversions (Greenfox)

As with Dáimh's earlier releases, *Diversions* is a mix of Irish/Scottish/Cape Breton tunes and Scottish gaelic songs, some trad., some original. The songs tend to be on the quieter, more contemplative side of things, with fairly weighty subjects. *Mo Mhàiri bheag* mourns the accidental killing of a young soldier's bride, while *He 'm èille 's na ho ro* tackles the defeat of the Jacobite uprising at the battle of Culloden. All cheery stuff. The tunes provide the counter-balance and are played with the feverish (and uncanny) skill that is typical of a lot of the young performers these days. No real surprises if you've heard anything from Dáimh before; but then if you've heard them before you know you'll want *Diversions*.
— By Richard Thornley

Rosemary Phelan

What Sings In the Blood (Mighty Wren)

Produced by Rosemary Phelan and Jason Laprade, *What Sings In the Blood* is an album for the mature listener. There is a sense of perseverance, a healing cajoled by the power of creativity. Technically the album is well-recorded, though it could use a little sprucing up. It's a safe record, nothing veers off course, everything is accessible and subject matter is rooted within the universal.

Phelan has a pretty voice, a sense of musicality and writes from the heart. Some of the lyrics are bit trite and clichéd. *Three Wishes* is the album's most daring, as the confessional acoustic song starts off with a building

three-chord opening. The token piano song, *Hymn for the Innocent*, is a lullaby-like ballad. *Lost Nation Road* is the darkest track, exploring the wilds of imagination and colonialism. *What Sings In the Blood's* closer, *Invisible*, relays the heart of the album: love is all we need.

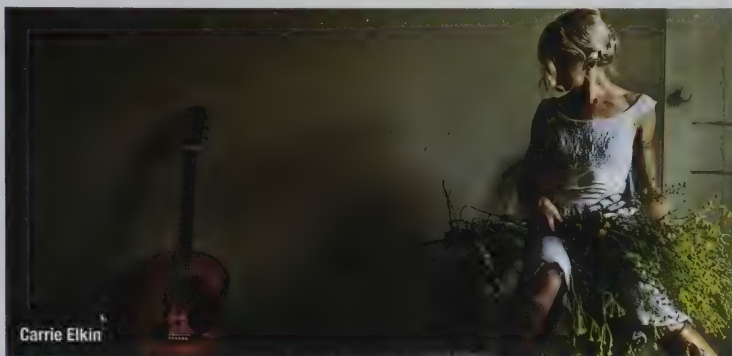
— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Carrie Elkin

Call It My Garden (Red House Records)

This is Austin, TX, based Carrie Elkin's fifth disc, her earlier efforts being *Simplicity* (1996), *Live At The Front Room* (2001), *The Waltz* (2004), and *The Jeopardy of Circumstance* (2007). Co-produced by guitar, lap steel and Dobro player Colin Brooks (from The Band of Heathens), along with the singer's partner, Danny Schmidt (who adds some backing vocals and percussion), the disc is all Elkin's compositions, with the exception of a laid-back, slightly more country version of Dar Williams's *Iowa*, which Elkins does a fine job on and which also contains some nice slide work by Brooks.

Elkin's voice has a nice, soft, slightly sexy drawl, with a bit of a hoarse edge to it when she wants to cut through a little more. It's the kind of voice you listen to and sounds even better when it's double-tracked against itself like it is on some tracks. The songs and performances are solid and the disc should continue to expand Elkin's fan base. Indeed, the first track, the swinging *Jesse Likes Birds*, made No. 1 on FOLKDJ-L radio playlists for the month of January. Another good in-the-pocket track is *Guilty*



Hands. A fine disc from a fine performer.

— By Barry Hammond

Andrea Ramolo

The Shadows and the Cracks (Thomiac

Records)

This is the second release from Andrea Ramolo and demonstrates the wide range of styles this singer/songwriter can slip into as easily as donning a comfortable old bathrobe. The 10-track disc serves up nine originals and one co-write with Cindy Doire.

Ramolo's sultry voice is perfectly suited to bluesy material, and there are a couple of such offerings here. She can employ a rawness in her vocal delivery that meshes well with country pop, and there is some here. Do mournful ballads tug at your inner Samaritan? Andrea delivers. Swamp fever got you down? Ramolo's the doctor.

This is a competent, serviceable, likable album but there is little to distinguish it from the other thousand worthy efforts that flow into *Penguin Eggs*.

Versatility is a fine attribute but you have to focus on something before deviation becomes aimless wandering. Ramolo needs to start taking some chances or she will find herself in the music industry's laundry hamper.

— By Doug Swanson

The Town Pants

Shore Leave (Savage Pants)

It seems to me that if you're going to cleave closely to musical models set down by innovators gone before then you darn well better do some innovating yourself. We've seen it before so many times—bold new idea emerges, there's a brief period of excitement when things really do change, and then we get lumped with years and years of pale and paler imitators. All this is by way of saying that *Spirit of the West*, *The Pogues*, and *Great Big Sea* have all been done to death and while *The Town Pants* is a pretty fine evocation of some those bands' glories, it ain't enough. Still, I bet they pack 'em in come St. Patrick's Day.

— By Richard Thornley

Aurelio Martinez

Laru Beya (Next Ambience)

Aurelio Martinez is a dynamic musician, steeped in the traditions of his people, the Garifuna. Descendants of the survivors of a shipwrecked slave ship, Garifuna villages dot the shores of the Caribbean from Belize to Nicaragua. Although they have incorporated aspects of Latin culture from their neighbours, Garifuna culture survives in their way of living, pounding cassava and pulling fish from the sea, and in their unique language and the rhythms and melodies undiluted from African origins.

Pressure from developers for their land, and from efforts to "modernize" the Garifuna, has eroded the culture. In recent years a charismatic voice for

the people emerged in the person of Andy Palacio, who transformed Garifuna music into "punta rock", a style that captured the imagination of international listeners. Travelling to festivals throughout Europe and North America, Palacio galvanized the Garifuna with pride and a recognition of their uniquely beautiful music.

Returning from an international tour, Palacio passed away suddenly in 2008, leaving a huge void in leadership. Devastated by the loss, Aurelio Martinez has stepped up as the heir to this mission: to continue to spread awareness of the Garifuna people, their tremendous gift of music to the world, and their right to continue to live in their traditional style, on the lands they have occupied for centuries.

That's the back story. As for the present, put simply: this album, *Laru Beya* (By The Beach) rocks, rolls, hypnotizes and entwines with seductive rhythms, joyful singing, and a raw spirit that tells all the history you'd ever want to know.

— By Lark Clark

CaneFire

Pandemonium (Independent)

If you derive pleasure from trying something new, going somewhere different, you'll be all the more refreshed (if not blown away) by this sophomore release from Caribbean Latin jazz supergroup CaneFire. More renowned in Trinidad and Tobago than they are at home—for now—the band is built around the musical expertise, if not star power, of Trinidadian calypso legend David Rudder, coupled with the unswerving vision of Toronto's own pianist/composer Jeremy Ledbetter.

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sounds, informed by jazz and played by a *Who's Who* of gifted players—is headlined by steelpan master Mark Mosca and a cast of players adding piquant Cuban, Puerto Rican, African and South American flavours, capped off by guests like Brazilian jazz legend/accordionist Hermeto Pascoal and Venezuelan singer, Eliana Cuevas.

From the aptly titled *Madman's Jig* to the absolute detonation that is Charlie Parker's *Donna Lee* (*Goes South*), *Pandemonium* is a supercharged collision of piano, steel drums, trumpet and percussion—a lit fuse that explodes in joyous celebration at a breakneck pace. At the same time, Ledbetter's piano establishes some exquisite moments, the calm before the storms that follow. The 10-plus-minute *Fountain of Youth* simply soars above the clouds, driven aloft by Ledbetter's piano and kept there by Cuevas's wall of swirling vocals and Pascoal's melodic.

Yet it's the drop-dead compositional sophistication found on creations like *Two Cousins*, a horn and percussion-driven instrumental, that quickly

outdistances this superb cast of players from anyone else pretending to be in this category. Joyous doesn't quite cut it. Although the title, *Pandemonium*, suggests chaos, this is far from reality. Every note and beat played across the album's duration has been carefully considered, is deftly performed and the resulting maelstrom won't likely stand for any audience sitting down. Shouldn't prove a problem.

— By Eric Thom

The Lonesome Brothers

The Last CD (Captivating Music)

Ray Mason

Like Bugs Chewing on Paper (Captivating Music)

You have to admire Ray Mason and the Lonesome Brothers' devotion to their craft. Mason has been playing music in and around Massachusetts since the mid-'60s and he joined up with Jim Armentti in 1985 to form the Lonesome Brothers. With the help of his trusty 1965 Silvertone guitar, Mason released five cassettes in the '80s and since 1994 he has released a dozen solo albums.

The Last CD is the Lonesome Brothers' seventh. Mason's

songs have even been the subject of a tribute album. All this time, both Mason and the Lonesome Brothers have remained true to their artistic vision. In fact, one could argue that they were playing Americana before the term was coined.

Both albums are relatively short by today's norms but they're priced accordingly. The writing credits on *The Last CD*'s 12 songs are divided equally between Mason and Armentti. There's a refreshing immediacy and lack of pretension to Mason and the Lonesome Brothers. Fans of Marshall Crenshaw and the like might want to consider these veterans.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau

Steve Poltz

Dreamhouse (New Scotland Records)

Steve Poltz has made Halifax's dream record despite living in California. Naturally, it's produced by the legendary Joel Plaskett; portrays beautiful artwork by Plaskett's wife, artist Rebecca Kraatz; and features an appearance by ethereal songbird Jenn Grant on *Dreamhouse*, *Killin' Myself* (*To Be With You*) and *Digging For Icicles*. Even David Myles

makes an appearance; he lends his trumpet skills on *A Dog In Bosnia*.

Poltz shares his dream to wander the world with his true love. *License Plate Eyes* is an acoustic ode to life on the road. *Wish the Wind* is a weathervane of adorableness. Poltz has got cutesy down pat. Some ailments are more beneficial than others. *Medicine* is for anyone who enjoys the feeling of an empty pint glass or yearns for a full heart.

No folk album is complete with a trip down memory lane. *Dreamhouse* closes with *The Way We Were*, a song for love gone askew.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Christi Andropolis

Rust & Holler (Furrow Records)

Christi Andropolis's debut solo CD starts with the child ballad *Cambric Shirt*, moves onto a well known long drag shanty, *The Dead Horse*, then winds its way through a number of originals and traditional covers. The overriding musical reference point, however, seems to be contemporary blues. It pervades her singing style and phrasing and filters through the playing and arrangements. It's as if



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Joan Osborne decided to sing Norma Waterson's repertoire.

Her singing and fiddle playing is strong and the music is well played and produced. It's the concept that doesn't work for me. Her bio calls it "exploring connections between roots music on both sides of the Atlantic". Sometimes laying down the right groove and singing an old trad like *Marrowbones* over the top of it can work well. In this case, I remain unconvinced.

There's tons of potential here and obvious talent. Tasty ingredients, questionable recipe.

— By Tim Readman

Ron Mason

Move the Earth (Independent)

For the first half of the 20th century, the southern Alberta city of Medicine Hat produced 75 per cent of Canada's pottery. Names like Hycroft China and especially Medalta put the Hat on the map, even more than Rudyard Kipling, who said the city, with its natural gas, has "all hell for a basement."

Fifty years after Medalta closed, there is still some mystique about the city, where singer-songwriter Ron Mason has found fertile

ground for an entire album of songs.

With the help of fine musicians like John Reischman and Ken Hamm, Mason has turned turned out a worthy selection of tunes about the colourful characters and events that happened around the potteries. The mayor who won a foot race against a horse, the artist who did much of the decorating, the glazers who have remained friends since the 1940s, and the labour strife that occasionally beset the factories. This is a fascinating piece of Canadiana, and what better way to tell it than through song?

— By Mike Sadava

The Stanfields

Vanguard of the Young and Reckless (Groundswell Music)

Nova Scotian punk-rock-Celtic-folk in the style of the Dropkick Murphys or Flogging Molly is on the menu here, served up by five lads recently voted by the fans as "Halifax's Best Band". "Oh, bloody hell, not another one," I thought to myself as the opening bars of *The Dirtiest Drunk (in the History of Liquor)* kicked in. Well, to my surprise, there's much to like here.



The Stanfields

For a start there's good, solid lyrics, interesting stories and more than a bit of humour. Then there's the playing, which is bang on, especially the rockin' guitars. That opening track just flies along and sets the scene for the boozy-good-time-music-with-a-brain that follows. Surprisingly then, this CD is not as dumb as it looks and it is well worth a good listen. So sit down and tuck in, but careful you don't burn your mouth!

– By Tim Readman

Fribo

Happ (Independent)

Fribo is made up of three musicians from England, Scotland and Norway. Anne Sofie Linge Valdal (vocals, flutes), Sarah-Jane Summers (fiddles, vocals) and Ewan MacPherson (guitars, vocals) serve up a delightful mix of styles and sounds accompanied by various percussionists. The Scandinavian flavour predominates on this collection but there are all sorts of other influences at play here.

It is all executed with energy and a sense of fun that is really engaging. There are a few exponents of this hybrid of Celtic,

English and Nordic sounds on the circuit, which has recently prompted the media to inflict the dreadful label of "Nu-Nordic" upon them. Forget the categorization, just call it what it really is: great music!

– By Tim Readman

Johanna Divine

Mile-High Rodeo (Hearth Music)

Johanna Divine seems like a multi-talented sort. Having been a documentary filmmaker, a grant writer for non-profit organizations, the operations director of the Acadiana Center for the Arts, and a jingle writer for an ad agency, she's turned her hand to the singer/songwriter field. She also has some talented help.

Kevin Wimmer (fiddle player with Balfa Tujours), Glenn Fields (drummer for The Red Stick Ramblers), Chris Stafford (guitar) and Chris Segura (fiddle), both from Feufollet, add to the proceedings and the disc is co-produced by Dirk Powell (also of Balfa Tujours, not to mention several film scores and other producing for the likes of Tim O'Brien, T Bone Burnett, Jack White and Ralph Stanley).

To be in that kind of company you've got to deliver the goods and Divine does. The songs cover several genres and styles but basically fall under Louisiana roots music. Both as a lyricist and a singer, Divine cuts the mustard with her smoky, muted-horn of a voice.

It's a lively disc that can rock, swing, honky-tonk or ballad-croon and will have the listener tapping their toes and nodding their head if they're not up on the dance floor. We predict she'll be as successful at this career as she was at her others.

– By Barry Hammond



Eliza Gilkyson

Roses at the End of Time (Red House Records)

Sometimes reviewing recordings gets difficult, especially with artists who have actually forged a decent career and have delivered great work in the past. Eliza has been in and around the music business all her life. Her first album came out in 1969. She's been on my radar for more than 10 years delivering a series of albums in the 2000s that are as good a body of work as any artist in that time.

So what do you say about the new one? It's great. If this was a debut album I'd be gushing all over it, saying, 'What a great new voice has entered the folk roots community.' But it's just another great record from Eliza—like the last six or seven.

This new one strikes a lovely balance between the personal and the political (I like my artists to be aware of the political as well as the personal, 'cause that's the way I am.) Ten stellar songs are delivered in a variety

of styles, from the rocky to the bluesy to the moody, with skilful and emotional ease. I especially loved the blues-based and trombone-flavored *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* with background vocals by John Gorka.

"What kind of beast comes slouching / slouching towards Bethlehem / He's comin' in the name of finance / corporations, religion, and violence / countin' on collusion and silence / Slouching towards Bethlehem"

Roses at the End of Time is a wonderful collection of songs from an artist who has been at the top of her game for a while and is seemingly determined not to slack off and live off past laurels.

– By les siemieniuk

Craig Werth

The Spokes Man (Independent)

For the last four-plus years, Craig Werth's name has been served up as accompanist to David Francey when he performs. Craig also co-produced Francey's *Right of Passage*,



Reviews

which won a best album Juno in 2008.

But as with some sidemen, there is another life, and with *The Spokes Man* Craig Werth steps back into the spotlight as the frontman. He has a previous collection of songs out as well as an instrumental album.

Craig is from New England and his songwriting style evokes that branch of American folk music, plied by people like John Gorka and David Mallet. *The Spokes Man* offers 14 original songs with strong vocals and lovely, spare arrangements featuring his guitar work, with touches of cello, harmonica, mandolin, fiddle, bouzouki and some terrific harmony singing. He has also assembled an international team of friends who contribute to the album, including David Francey and

Mike Ford from Canada.

Craig tells stories well, has an eye for the human condition with all its foibles and passions, and he accompanies himself superbly. He seems to have filled the time he had on his hands when wasn't onstage with David Francey very well.
— by les siemieniuk

John Bottomley

The Healing Dream (Independent)

When you open *The Healing Dream*, on the inside cover in bold letters it says "Music has a Healing Power". I think everyone who reads this magazine loves music enough to agree with that.

I've been a John Bottomley admirer for a while, through his flirtation with commercial success in the mid-'90s with the album *Blackberry*, garnering

him top 40 hits *You Lose and You Gain* and *Long Way To Go*. I saw him perform a killer set at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival fuelled by his lovely singing voice and going from moody balladry to kickass roots rock. He was on fire.

Commercial success is fickle so John persevered and kept putting out interesting and increasingly more personal, mystical and introspective albums in the ensuing years. His albums were always sublimely done and really well-performed. *The Healing Storm* is no exception. Songs filled with mythical beings and demons are delivered with a great roots-rock feel, aided by tasteful mandolin, electric and slide guitar touches by Vancouver's Paul Rigby. If that's all there was to the story I end it here and recommend you

acquire *The Healing Dream*.

But it seems the music did not have enough healing power for John and he gave up the fight with his personal demons in April at the age of 50. *The Healing Dream* is a strong, immensely enjoyable album but in light of events ... the words take on so much more and perhaps unintended meaning, and the emotions evoked seem that much stronger and more poignant knowing it was his last kick at the can.

So long, John. Thanks for the songs you left behind.

— By les siemieniuk

100 mile house

hollow ponds (Independent)

CDs that excite me plop their way into my lap in the funniest ways. My first David Francey album took two years to wind

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100 mile house

its way westward from Quebec and arrive courtesy of Vic Bell from the Nickelodeon Music Club in Calgary. At the 2011 Calgary Folk Festival Song contest finals for the "pros and prose" category (for writers who have released a commercial CD), I really liked the song *Better Still* by 100 mile house. It placed first and earned the band \$3,500 in prize money, among other things. I asked Peter Stone to send me some more of their work and a brown envelope subsequently arrived with *hollow ponds*.

It is the band's third release. Peter Stone, an expat Brit, and his wife, Denise Mackay, moved back to Edmonton a few years ago after a time playing in and around in London. Returning to Alberta, they reconnected with Scott Zubot and 100 mile house was formed.

Thank heavens. It is a magical combination and *hollow ponds* is a terrific album. Moody at times, Peter and Denise's voices blend perfectly and Scott's fiddle adds just the right touch. Evoking travels done and to come, the songs seem to approach and then roll over you like a line of gentle prairie rain.

I particularly like Peter's turns of well-written phrases like this from *better still*:

"If this could bore one lesson / I should learn to be more honest still... / So the next time I see my parents / I'll tell them how I really feel"

You will be hearing more and more from this band and if they are as new to you as to me, go seek them out at their gigs. Trust me, it'll be worth it.

—By les siemieniuk

Various Artists

Alligator Records 40th Anniversary Collection (Alligator)

Alligator Records owes its success to one man: Bruce Iglauer. It's one thing to finance

the show but to own the ear, control the output, befriend the artists and survive in these tumultuous times (while still running on original parts) is something worth celebrating—from his perspective and ours. The formidable and friendly Iglauer might be the first to deny it, but his one-man mission to share and spread news of the blues is clearly one of the genre's greatest legacies.

As to how Iglauer arrives at what to include, there is a method to his madness: making an effort to represent the key historic artists as well as balancing this with enough of the current roster to point out where the label was going. In his own words, "I wanted tracks that represented what I personally love about these artists' music, and also tracks that correctly represented them, so that someone hearing them for the first time would have a general sense of their sound and style. And I wanted a listening experience that would flow..." Feel is everything to

Iglauer—as is avoiding the expected or the obvious. This outlook has gone a long way to describe how Alligator has been able to, err, swim rather than sink. The jump from early Hound Dog Taylor—his first signing—to current successes with new artists like JJ Grey &

Mofro and Eric Lindell can be a huge one. Yet, in the context of this compilation, it all carries that reliable Alligator stamp of excellence, which, as a result of the trust Iglauer's built over time, has earned the label blind allegiance over the years, and deservedly so. The label's roster, alone, fills in any blanks.

—By Eric Thom

Various artists

35 Years of Stony Plain (Stony Plain Records)

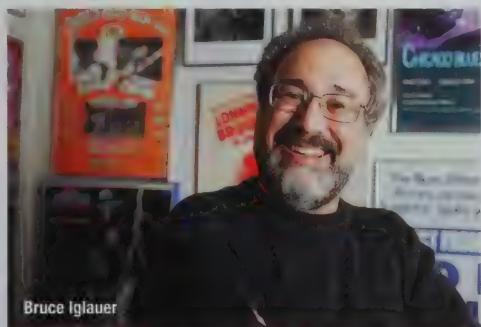
The late Jerry Wexler, a founder of Atlantic Records, once called Stony Plain Records "an endangered species in a dangerous time." Holger Petersen's company has proven that a record company can survive this age of downloads, choosing quality over quantity to find a niche market of roots music lovers.

Every five years this Edmonton company provides proof that it is alive and well with a compilation, and the 35-year anniversary version reaffirms the quality of this boutique record label.


The first disc, which emphasizes singers and songwriters, includes everyone from Maria Muldaur to Spirit of the West, Bob Carpenter to Emmylou Harris, and there's a nod to Ian Tyson, whose 1995 *Cowboyography* disc turned the company around.

The second disc is a salute to Petersen's love of the blues, and Duke Robillard, a longtime collaborator with Stony Plain, is all over this disc, with 10 tracks that he either produced or performed on. It's great blues from both sides of the border, including unreleased tracks by Robert Nighthawk and King Biscuit Boy.


And don't forget to take a gander at the bonus DVD. The goofy video by Jr. Gone Wild, a country punk band that earned



Bruce Iglauer



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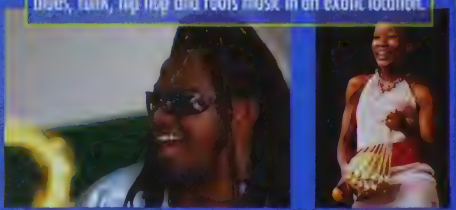



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far more accolades than money, is almost worth the price of the compilation.

Even if you've got some of the tracks in your collection, this will make the ultimate mix to take on the road this summer. Here's to another 35 years.

— By Mike Sadava

Various artists

Coal Miner's Daughter: A Tribute To Loretta Lynn (Sony Music)

Loretta Lynn is already a highly celebrated legend in country music circles, having had a Hollywood movie made about her life story — Sissy Spacek playing Loretta and Tommy Lee Jones playing her husband, Doolittle. Tributes are always nice, though, and this one features a litany of country and rock stars.

Jack White, the producer of her 2004 "comeback" record, *Van Lear Rose*, is represented by the White Stripes' version of *Rated X*, one of the more experimental arrangements of her songs.

Most of the others play it pretty safe, though, with stellar fret and rhythm work. Reba's version of *If You're Not Gone Too Long*, with The Time Jumpers, is one of the most spirited, with a nice accordion solo by Jeff Taylor. Lucinda

Williams (always emotionally spot-on), Gretchen Wilson, Lee Ann Womack, Carrie Underwood, Alan Jackson and Martina McBride, Faith Hill, Steve Earle and Allison Moorer all turn in solid versions of Loretta's songs, as do newcomer's from Franklin, TN, Paramore. The only things the listener might question is the inclusion of Kid Rock on *I Know How* and the cross-genre/younger audience pandering stab of Loretta, herself, teamed with Sheryl Crow and Miranda Lambert. Still, pretty decent as tributes go.

— By Barry Hammond

Various Artists

Oak Ash Thorn (Folk Police Recordings)

This is a selection of U.K. folk performers tackling the late Peter Bellamy's settings for Rudyard Kipling poems, featuring all kinds of treatments, from traditional to new folk versions. I love The Unthanks' reading of the title track. Olivia Chaney sings *The Brookland Road* beautifully. The Fay Hield Band's take on *The Looking Glass* is wonderfully chilling. Tim Eriksen weighs in with a sturdy performance of *Poor Honest Men*, which explodes at its ending into distorted guitar-drenched cacophony.

Emily Portman and Finn McNicholas do quite a nice version of *The Heaven's Above Us*, except it sounds as if they accidentally allowed a washing machine and a Bjork rhythm track to leak into the recording. Overall, the more straightforward renditions went down best in my house. I reckon the term psych folk could well be just another name for bloody awful. They sound like people who don't actually like British folk music, and so would rather strangle it. The good bits are great, the rest are not.

— By Tim Readman

Various artists

The Rough Guide to Paris Lounge (World Network)

OK, some good stuff here, somewhat reminiscent of David Byrne's *Cuisine Non-Stop* compilation from a decade ago, but also some less, uh, engaging moments. Most of the artists contribute two tracks, which means you get slightly more chance to get a sense of each than with some compilations. Which is great in the case of Pascal Parisot's banjo'n'electro cool and Caravan Palace's exotic retro soundscapes (their Hot Club dancefloor workout, *Jolie Coquine*, is a standout).

Not so great in the case of the (seriously) syrupy Benjamin Biolay and the rather leaden Fredda. And how George

Sound's franco-rap qualifies as anything approximating "lounge" is beyond me. This is one to download selectively for shufflin' on your iPod.

— By Richard Thornley

Various Artists

All Along the Wall (Fellside Recordings)

All Along the Wall is an arts project looking at life and activity on and around Hadrian's Wall, both ancient and modern. The wall in question was built across Northern Britain by the Romans to keep out the Scots and secure Rome's conquest of the lands to the south. Its remains still stretch 70 miles from coast to coast through scenic and remote areas of Northumbria and Cumbria. This recording features the talents of musicians and songwriters Jez Lowe, Julie Matthews, Rory McLeod, Ruth Notman, Boo Hewerdine and poets Kate Fox and Elvis McGonagall; who all spent a week sequestered in a remote Northumbrian farmhouse, creating songs and spoken-word pieces.

They are joined by fiddler Kate Bramley on this live concert performance of the fruits of their labour. This is an entertaining listen; intriguing, moving, informative and inspiring just like its subject ... not to mention very funny in places. If you've been to the wall, this will take you back; if you haven't, it



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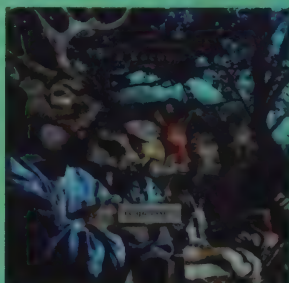
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Ali Farka Touré: African Guitar

will take you there. Either way, it's well worth the trip.
— By Tim Readman

Various Artists

Rough Guide to Flamenco Dance (World Music Network)

Although titled *Flamenco Dance*, all but two of the tracks on this collection feature extended vocals with bona fide pedigrees. While flamenco guitar is hugely popular, flamenco vocals of this intensity are heard far less frequently. The album notes remind us that dance, singing, guitar and percussion are inextricably bound in the art form. Of particular interest is a track by Jorge Pardo, who in the 1970s brought saxophone and flute into the flamenco family.

— By Lark Clark

Various artists

The Rough Guide to African Guitar Legends (World Music Network)

How can one argue with a collection that showcases the music of such African guitar luminaries as King Sunny Adé, Ali Farka Touré, Franco, and Syran Mbenza? Well, you can't really, but I have a few minor quibbles with this collection, which aims to teach us why

"these ground-breaking players are heroes in their own land".

Two missed opportunities are the pieces selected to demonstrate the guitar mastery of Sunny Adé and Oliver Mtukudzi—the former is represented by a dub mix that is atypical of that great man's output, while the Mtukudzi piece is just plain boring. I would also argue that any number of stronger pieces could have been chosen to represent Tinariwen but thankfully we have incredible guitar workouts from Djelimady Tounkara (*Fanta Bourama*), Franco (the sadly short *En Entre OK, On Sort KO*), and Eric Agyeman (the infectious *Nea Abe Beto*) to compensate. So, not the perfect African guitar legends compilation by any stretch but not a bad place to start if you're new to the dazzling variety of guitar styles that Africa has to offer.
— By Richard Thornley

Various Artists

Rough Guide to the Music of Afghanistan (World Music Network)

This is the first collection of Afghan music to bring together classical, popular and traditional folk music of the region. Influences from Persia, India and Central Asia meld in Afghan

music, creating a unique entity.

Between 1996 and 2001, the Taliban succeeded in shutting down Afghan TV and Radio Afghanistan, hunted down musicians and destroyed instruments in public bonfires. Today popular music is returning to the country, although a slipping headscarf on a recent televised talent show resulted in a raging public debate.

Most of the music on this album will be completely new to western listeners, and hopefully gives some much needed insight into the emotional nature of the country.

— By Lark Clark

Various Artists

Carnaval Brésilien 1930-1956 (Fidemex & Associates)

There have been other albums devoted to Brazilian carnival music but, to this reviewer's knowledge, none have documented the eclectic nature of the music as comprehensively as *Carnaval Brésilien 1930-1956*. The fact that the sound restoration of the original source material is excellent, as is the bilingual annotation (although more extensive in French than in English), adds to the value of the album.

Besides the obvious European and African influences, one can hear jazz as well as the roots of the samba and the marchinha (a march), two genres that were created for the event. Some of the 36 tracks on this two-CD compilation set the standards and established the repertoire for the three-day festival for generations to come. Except for Carmen Miranda, whose sole track, *Balancê*, dates from 1936, the artists are mostly unknown outside Brazil.

In the first half of the 20th century the carnival helped forge the Brazilian identity and lessened the gap between social

classes. The musicians were a melting pot and those featured on this compilation contributed to the country's musical legacy.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau

Various artists

The Rough Guide to the Music of Cuba (World Music Network)

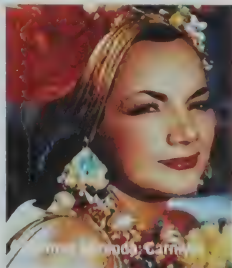
Joining the many other Rough Guides in print (RG: Salsa Dura, Salsa Divas, etc.) is the Rough Guide to the Music of Cuba. This output distinguishes itself by including two CDs, a compilation of classic son bands with a modern edge and, unusually for Rough Guides, a CD entirely of one band, Sierra Maestra.

The Rough Guides can be counted on to have good liner notes, as befits a guide. This album's notes are especially informative, although tracing a definitive history of Cuban music in the space of 24 paragraphs is, of course, impossible.

The Sierra Maestra recordings are largely from the latest incarnation of the group, which lacks leader Juan de Marcos, who has left Cuba for greener (\$) pastures. Cuba's multi-generational groups (Orquesta Aragon, for example) are much to be admired for keeping musical traditions alive, but the new Sierra Maestra seems to lack the oomph that group formerly packed. The notes are all there, but a certain cockiness has vanished.

Ah well, over all, a good sampling of great music.

— By Lark Clark





Paul Marchand, Stéphanie Gagnon et Martin Racine

Tendrement, merci

La voix magnifiquement bien posée de la flûtiste et violoniste Stéphanie Gagnon sur L'hirondelle a obligé Yves Bernard à se mettre en quête de superlatifs. Accompagnée de Paul Marchand et de Martin Racine, elle explore principalement le répertoire traditionnel breton qui offre ses chansons à chanter doucement.

Depuis plus d'un an, son nom est sur plusieurs lèvres: Stéphanie Gagnon interprète des airs traditionnels à sa manière à elle, avec une voix toute fraîche qui n'est pas sans rappeler certaines jeunes chanteuses pop, mais le répertoire est livré tout en douceur avec âme et grande sensibilité. Au début, le trio portait son nom, mais avec la parution du disque L'hirondelle, on a mis en avant-plan les noms de Paul Marchand et de Martin Racine, les deux grands frères qui s'amuse à brouiller ses pistes. Le résultat est superbe, à dominante folk et empreint de multiple couleurs.

«C'est vrai que ça porte à confusion parce que c'est moi qui choisis les chansons, mais le reste du travail est fait à trois», explique Stéphanie. Si elle fait de la musique depuis l'âge de cinq ans, la pique de la musique traditionnelle ne lui est venue que plus tard: «C'est en rencontrant des amis à l'université à Québec alors que je devais avoir 18-19 ans. Ensemble, nous avons formé Gros-Gnômes, un groupe trad de party. Je jouais surtout de la flûte et c'était surtout les gars qui chantaient, comme dans

un vrai groupe de trad», rigole-t-elle.

L'expérience dure quelques années au tournant du nouveau millénaire. Le nom du groupe se réfère à ses membres qui étudient en agronomie. Au début, Gros-Gnômes, repique des airs déjà connus, puis, les six musiciens commencent à créer leurs propres arrangements. Par la suite, Stéphanie part en voyage et revient s'installer dans la région d'Alma au lac Saint-Jean, là où elle est née. Elle s'installe sur la ferme de son père, devient agricultrice et forme en 2004 le groupe l'Attisée avec la violoneuse Sophie Lavoie et le guitariste Pierre-Antoine Gauthier.

«Ce groupe ressemble davantage à ce que je fais maintenant avec Paul Marchand et Martin Racine», raconte la chanteuse flûtiste qui est aussi violoneuse. «On chante des trucs plus mollo. Moi c'est dans ma nature. Je suis quelqu'un d'assez doux, relax et calme. Ça se reflète dans mon choix de pièces, je ne cherche pas de chansons à répondre et je suis très attirée par le répertoire breton, il y a plein de beaux airs tout doux».

La pièce titre du disque L'hirondelle provient d'ailleurs de Haute Bretagne, alors que le trio marie également deux versions du classique Les marches de la cour du palais. Dans cette dernière, Stéphanie se livre à un duo vocal avec Paul en utilisant le tuilage, cette technique caractéristique du chant à danser breton. Les deux chantent à tour de rôle, mais le chanteur qui prend la suite de l'autre répète les dernières syllabes du précédent avec lui. «C'est pour que la pièce soit toujours en continu», explique Stéphanie.

Sa voix naturellement voilée qui rappelle par moments celle d'une petite fille,

contraste avec celle de Paul. C'est lui qui suggère l'arrangement de base pour chaque pièce et les idées sont fort variées, entre des atmosphères de folk, de blues, de rag et des énergies plus rockeuses, même si la musique demeure presque toujours acoustique. «À la guitare, il est très percussif et il peut faire sonner son instrument comme s'il y avait de la basse ou de la batterie. Il est presque un orchestre à lui seul», raconte Stéphanie.

Il n'est pas le dernier venu. Lanaudois de naissance, il a tour à tour participé à la formation des groupes Manigance et Entourloupe, sans compter ses collaborations avec la chanteuse Tess Leblanc, le flûtiste irlandais Desi Wilkinson et la violoniste américaine Laurie Hart, entre autres. Derrière Stéphanie, il fait la paire belle avec le violoneux Martin Racine, un autre vieux de la veille qui s'intéresse aux musiques québécoises et irlandaises depuis le revival des années 1970. Il fut un élément important de la Bottine souriante, lui injectant un swing contagieux. Avec Stéphanie et Paul, il joue également l'ukuléle, ce qui contribue à ponctuer le répertoire d'une sorte de légèreté spontanée qui complète à merveille le chant de Stéphanie. En plus, les deux se donnent la répartition au violon.

Stéphanie parle de cette complicité: «Il est également très rythmique et il excelle dans l'improvisation, alors que moi je suis plus harmonique et mélodique. Il veut tout le temps jouer à deux violons. Moi j'aime ça, mais je dois aussi me concentrer sur le chant, alors je lui laisse faire ses trucs et je vois par la suite comment je peux m'incérer là-dedans. Parfois on se double carrément».

Stéphanie joue instinctivement, tout comme elle choisit le répertoire. «C'est le texte qui est à la base de tout. Parfois les airs vont se modifier un peu. Il m'est même déjà arrivé de travailler avec des paroles dont je n'avais pas les airs. Je ne vais pas chercher volontairement des thématiques pour faire quelque chose d'uniforme, mais certains sujets me toucheront davantage. Par exemple, je ne vais pas nécessairement me diriger vers les marches de guerre. Les chansons, je les vois comme des petits films».

Du cinéma maison qui met en scène l'hirondelle à la recherche de l'amant égaré, le démon qui incite les jeunes à folâtrer, la belle qui évite le pire dans une histoire de maladresse amoureuse, la jeune femme qui refuse l'amour au vieillard insistant ou

cette autre qui l'accepte pour des raisons économiques. Quelques textes sont plus connus comme *Le roi a fait battre tambour*, inspiré de la version de Bernard Simard. Deux autres sont plus contemporains: Mon vieux François de Laurence Lepage et *La mauvaise réputation* de Brassens que le trio québécois comme si la pièce avait été écrite de ce côté-ci de l'Atlantique.

Et que retient Stéphanie de cette expérience? «Quand on est un jeune groupe, on est tout fringant et on veut aller dans toutes sortes de directions. Avec eux, c'est plus instinctif, ça va bien, ça coule vite et les arrangements se font facilement. On dirait qu'on revient à l'essentiel». En effet!

Nicolas Pellerin et les Grands Hurlleurs

Nicolas Pellerin se souvient du moment précis où il a commencé à jouer du violon. C'était le 26 décembre 1999 et il était minuit et quart. Pellerin était alors étudiant en mathématiques à l'université et avait 19 ans, un âge relativement avancé pour choisir un instrument de musique. Qu'à cela ne tienne, cette expérience marqua le début d'une belle obsession qui allait faire de lui l'un des musiciens les plus remarqués sur la scène traditionnelle québécoise. «Quand je suis retourné à l'école après les vacances, je ne pensais qu'à jouer du violon», se rappelle-t-il en riant. «J'ai vraiment accroché. Peu de temps après, je lâchais l'école pour me dévouer totalement au violon et pour rattraper le temps perdu. J'ai joué huit heures

par jour, tous les jours pendant des années.»

Pellerin est un grand violoniste, il a le feu aux doigts! Qui plus est, il possède une sensibilité et une intelligence musicale débordante d'enthousiasme lui permettant d'aborder les nuances d'une chanson. Il a joué au sein du nouveau groupe de musique traditionnelle Les Langues Fourchues pendant quelque temps, qui compte parmi ses membres Evelyne Gélinas, de *Galant* tu perds ton temps. Il a ensuite été engagé par Yves Lambert, ancien chanteur de *La Bottine Souriante*, pour faire partie de son *Bébert Orchestra*, et la rumeur de ses prouesses s'est répandue.

En 2007, Nicolas a enregistré un album avec son frère aîné, Fred Pellerin, un conteur extrêmement populaire au Québec. Même s'ils n'ont donné aucun spectacle, les deux frères ont vendu pas moins de 45 000 exemplaires de *Fred et Nicolas Pellerin en plus d'empocher un Félix*. Encouragé par cette réussite, Nicolas décide de quitter le *Bébert Orchestra* et de partir de son côté. Il forme Nicolas Pellerin et les Grands Hurlleurs avec le guitariste Simon Marion et le bassiste Simon Lepage.

Les Grands Hurlleurs tirent leur nom d'un navire de guerre français, un «navire de malheur», qui est le héros d'une vieille ballade navale intitulée «*Corsaire*», qu'ils ont d'ailleurs brillamment reprise sur leur premier album éponyme. «On s'est appelé Les Grands Hurlleurs parce qu'on voulait un nom qui représente l'énergie et le caractère de notre son. Hurler pour moi c'est un cri du cœur, c'est transmettre quelque chose de profond et de vrai.» Le folk de Pellerin n'est pas puriste. Les arrangements des chansons «*Rossignolet*» et «*Malmariée*»

s'inspirent du jazz et du funk, leur insufflant une nouvelle vitalité.

La musique de «*Corsaire*» a été ré-imaginée avec brio, avec d'autres instruments et des changements de tempo qui maintiennent l'intérêt et ajoutent à l'intensité de ce long récit poignant. Comme sur les autres chansons de l'album, Pellerin chante d'une voix à résonance nasale, forte et pénétrante, qui évoque les traditions maritimes de l'ouest de la France et de la Bretagne.

Nicolas Pellerin et les Grands Hurlleurs se sont également mérité un Félix avant de partir en tournée internationale. Ils sont présentement en studio en train de travailler sur leur deuxième album. «Le succès qu'a connu le premier album nous a mis un bon type de pression, nous poussant à créer quelque chose de spécial. Toutes les chansons instrumentales seront originales, écrites par moi ou par les deux Simons. De par leurs textes, les chansons sont encore traditionnelles, mais même si nous sommes ancrés dans ce répertoire, la musique avance et s'échappe des vieilles structures, empruntant entre autres à la sonorité des quatuors à cordes. Notre musique sera accessible, tout en étant pas mal intense et originale pour un album folk».

— Par Tony Montague

— Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

Genticorum

Nagez Rameurs (Roues et Archets)

Cela fait maintenant trois ans que *La Bibernoise*, le dernier album de Genticorum, s'est mérité à juste titre le Prix de musique folk canadienne pour album traditionnel de l'année. Dans *Nagez Rameurs*, nos hommes explorent les thèmes du voyage et du Nouveau Monde avec toujours plus de chansons traditionnelles québécoises. Cet album exprime une profondeur et une joie de vivre incroyables, qui caractérisent le groupe depuis leur premier album *Le Galarneau*. On remarque la légère gradation de la podorythmie sur l'hypnotique «*Reel Circulaire*», la chanson titre délicieusement à capella et la touchante «*Valse des poêles*» de Simon Riopel. En fait, tout l'album est remarquable! *Nagez Rameurs* est une autre belle preuve de la vitalité de Genticorum et de son importance au pays en tant que groupe traditionnel.

— Par Richard Thornley



Nicolas Pellerin et les Grands Hurlleurs



James Keelaghan

Singer/songwriter James Keelaghan outlines the uniqueness of creating music for public consumption and the responsibility of personal ethics associated with what that entails.

A few months ago a little controversy erupted concerning Nellie Furtado, a concert for some of Moammar Gadhafi's family and a \$1-million fee. In brief, someone found out about Ms. Furtado doing the gig and, when busted, she decided to donate the money to a charity.

There was a lot of discussion and self-righteous chest thumping over this, an opportunity for commentators on the right to poke at left-leaning arts culture and for entertainers to wag the finger and cluck at one of their own.

What barely showed its face was any sort of discussion of just what ethical code musicians do or should be expected to operate under.

Musicians have ethical obligations, as do most other professions. We have an ethical obligation to fulfil contracts and honour agreements. We have an ethical obligation to credit sources and to remain sober enough to perform. And that is about it. Those are the only ethical obligations, professionally, that we can or should be held to.

The rest of our behaviour is a matter of personal ethics and that's where musicians, entertainers, artists are held to a higher account than most.

No one suggests that SNC Lavalin, Suncor (or, indeed, the Government of Canada, which gave Libya most-favoured-nation trading status in 2009) give money

they earned in Libya to charity. People may lobby to have them stop working in Libya, they may boycott products, but to expect that there be some public form of expiation is unthinkable. They performed a service and were paid...Ms. Furtado, on the other hand, is down one million and has had a significant amount of mud flung at her. She has also shown, albeit a bit late, that she has some personal ethics.

But is that fair?

If you objected to her playing the concert and taking the money the remedy to the ethical problem is in your medicine cabinet, not hers. Don't buy her CDs, or if you are unethical yourself, pirate them.

So where does it come from, this desire to hold musicians to a higher ethical standard?

I played a club recently and in the break a woman approached me. She told me that she'd always been a big fan. She told me that a year ago she had to have a very risky major surgery. As she was being prepped and put under, they let her have whatever music she wanted and the last thing she heard before being fully sedated was a song of mine. She wanted me to know that the last song she heard could have been the last song she ever heard and asked if I could play that song in the second set.

What musicians do is entertain (one hopes). The funny thing is that it's not merely entertainment. If we do what we do well, the fruits of our labours touch people in ways we can't even begin to suspect. They get married to it, they make love to it, it accompanies them on road trips and, yes, it may be the last thing they take with them when the lights fade forever.

Holly Near wrote an article years ago in which she acknowledged that our music

sometimes has actual power over people. Not in a wafy, namby-pamby kind of way, but in a real, concrete way. She was speaking specifically of artists taking care not to use their position to sexually exploit others, but the power that music holds extends beyond that. We are held to a higher ethical standard because of that power.

If you were a fan of Nellie Furtado, and thought that taking money from despots or the families of despots was wrong, then Nellie let you down. You personally. How could she do that? I mean, she was there at your wedding. She was there when the radiator blew on the way to Drumheller. How could she do that, to you?

And that's why Nellie donated the money. Because to not make that gesture means that you disappoint thousands, or millions of people who have an intimate relationship with you, even though you have never met them.

Most musicians face the kind of personal ethical dilemma that Nellie has been going through from quite a different direction. Most of us are not being offered a million smackers to perform for dictators or their families, but are being asked to contribute our time, music and image for various causes and charities, and most of us are pretty careful about it. It would never enter my mind to play for a cause or a charity unless I firmly believed in it.

The bar is set rather lower for private parties. Again, most of my peers are not getting offers to play at swanky hotels for the highfalutin. I'm pretty sure there's no dirty money in my paycheck at the end of the night, although who knows who is in my audience? One thing is for sure: I don't want people listening to my music and thinking about Gadhafi.

That's why I relished the *schadenfreude* that attended the Furtado scandal. It meant that on some deep level, even the most anti-culture, right-wing knob or the most sanctimonious traditionalist understands that music is special, unique, unparalleled in its ability to intimately inhabit our lives.

Nellie Furtado did everything that was called for ethically by a professional musician. As a person, however, she realized that the money was tainted and made the decision to donate it. Now ask yourself: has anybody asked the charity not to accept the money because it is tainted? Or does it come clean in one wash?

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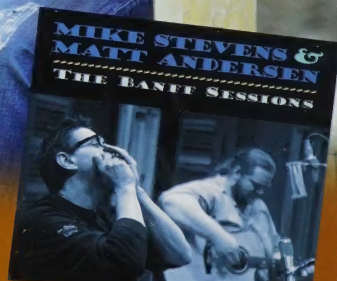


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